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By MISS BRADDON.

I

BELLA ROLLESTON had made up her mind that her only chance of earning her bread and helping her mother to an occasional crust was by going out into the great unknown world as companion to a lady. She was willing to go to any lady rich enough to pay her a salary and so eccentric as to wish for a hired companion. Five shillings told off reluctantly from one of those sovereigns which were so rare with the mother and daughter, and which melted away so quickly, five solid shillings, had been handed to a smartly-dressed lady in an office in Harbeck Street, W., in the hope that this very Superior Person would find a situation and a salary for Miss Rolleston.

The Superior Person glanced at the two half-crowns as they lay on the table where Bella's hand had placed them, to make sure they were neither of them florins, before she wrote a description of Bella's qualifications and requirements in a formidable-looking ledger.

"Age?" she asked, curtly.

"Eighteen, last July."

"Any accomplishments?"

"No, I am not at all accomplished. If I were I should want to be a governess—a companion seems the lowest stage."

"We have some highly accomplished ladies on our books as companions, or chaperon companions."

"Oh, I know!" babbled Bella, loquacious in her youthful candour. "But that is quite a different thing. Mother hasn't been able to afford a piano since I was twelve years old, so I'm afraid I've forgotten how to play. And I have had to help mother with her needlework, so there hasn't been much time to study."

"Please don't waste time upon explaining what you can't do, but kindly tell me anything you can do," said the Superior Person, crushingly, with her pen poised between delicate fingers waiting to write. "Can you read aloud for two or three hours at a stretch? Are you active and handy, an early riser, a good walker, sweet tempered, and obliging?"

"I can say yes to all those questions except about the sweetness. I think I have a pretty good temper, and I should be anxious to oblige anybody who paid for my services. I should want them to feel that I was really earning my salary."

"The kind of ladies who come to me would not care for a talkative companion," said the Person, severely, having finished writing in her book. "My connection lies chiefly among the aristocracy, and in that class considerable deference is expected."

"Oh, of course," said Bella; "but it's quite different when I'm talking to you. I want to tell you all about myself once and for ever."

"I am glad it is to be only once!" said the Person, with the edges of her lips.

The Person was of uncertain age, tightly laced in a black silk gown. She had a powdery complexion and a handsome clump

of somebody else's hair on the top of her head. It may be that Bella's girlish freshness and vivacity had an irritating effect upon nerves weakened by an eight hours day in that over-heated second floor in Harbeck Street. To Bella the official apartment, with its Brussels carpet, velvet curtains and velvet chairs, and French clock, ticking loud on the marble chimney-piece, suggested the luxury of a palace, as compared with another second floor in Walworth where Mrs. Rolleston and her daughter had managed to exist for the last six years.

"Do you think you have anything on your books that would suit me?" faltered Bella, after a pause.

"Oh, dear, no, I have nothing in view at present," answered the Person, who had swept Bella's half-crowns into a drawer, absent-mindedly, with the tips of her fingers. "You see, you are so very unformed—so much too young to be companion to a lady of position. It is a pity you have not enough education for a nursery governess, that would be more in your line."

"And do you think it will be very long before you can get me a situation?" asked Bella, doubtfully.

being a burden to her. I want a salary that I can share with her."

"There won't be much margin for sharing in the salary you are likely to get at your age—and with your—very—unformed manners," said the Person, who found Bella's peony cheeks, bright eyes, and unbridled vivacity more and more oppressive.

"Perhaps if you'd be kind enough to give me back the fee I could take it to an agency where the connection isn't quite so aristocratic," said Bella, who—as she told her mother in her recital of the interview—was determined not to be sat upon.

"You will find no agency that can do more for you than mine," replied the Person, whose harpy fingers never relinquished coin. "You will have to wait for your opportunity. Yours is an exceptional case: but I will bear you in mind, and if anything suitable offers I will write to you. I cannot say more than that."

The half-contemptuous bend of the stately head, weighted with borrowed hair, indicated the end of the interview. Bella went back to Walworth—tramped sturdily every inch of the way in the September afternoon—and "took off" the Superior Person for the

"NOT A LOVE AFFAIR, I HOPE?"

"I really cannot say. Have you any particular reason for being so impatient—not a love affair, I hope?"

"A love affair!" cried Bella, with flaming cheeks. "What utter nonsense. I want a situation because mother is poor, and I hate

amusement of her mother and the landlady, who lingered in the shabby little sitting room after bringing in the tea-tray, to applaud Miss Rolleston's "taking off."

"Dear, dear, what a mimic she is!" said the landlady. "You ought to have let her

go on the stage, mum. She might have made her fortune as a hactress"

II.

BELLA waited and hoped, and listened for the postman's knocks which brought such store of letters for the parlours and the first floor, and so few for that humble second floor, where mother and daughter sat sewing with hand and with wheel and treadle, for the greater part of the day. Mrs. Rolleston was a lady by birth and education, but it had been her bad fortune to marry a scoundrel; for the last half-dozen years she had been that worst of widows, a wife whose husband had deserted her. Happily, she was courageous, industrious, and a clever needlewoman, and she had been able just to earn a living for herself and her only child, by making mantles and cloaks for a West-end house. It was not a luxurious living. Cheap lodgings in a shabby street off the Walworth Road, scanty dinners, homely food, well-worn raiment, had been the portion of mother and daughter; but they loved each other so dearly, and Nature had made them both so light-hearted, that they had contrived somehow to be happy.

But now this idea of going out into the world as companion to some fine lady had rooted itself into Bella's mind, and although she idolized her mother, and although the parting of mother and daughter must needs tear two loving hearts into shreds, the girl longed for enterprise and change and excitement, as the pages of old longed to be knights, and to start for the Holy Land to break a lance with the infidel.

She grew tired of racing downstairs every time the postman knocked, only to be told "nothing for you, miss," by the smudgy-faced drudge who picked up the letters from the passage floor. "Nothing for you, miss," grinned the lodging-house drudge, till at last Bella took heart of grace and walked up to Harbeck Street, and asked the Superior Person how it was that no situation had been found for her.

"You are too young," said the Person, "and you want a salary."

"Of course I do," answered Bella, "don't other people want salaries?"

"Young ladies of your age generally want a comfortable home."

"I don't," snapped Bella; "I want to help mother."

"You can call again this day week," said the Person; "or, if I hear of anything in the meantime, I will write to you."

No letter came from the Person, and in exactly a week Bella put on her neatest hat, the one that had been seldomest caught in the rain, and trudged off to Harbeck Street.

It was a dull October afternoon, and there was a greyness in the air which might turn to fog before night. The Walworth Road shops gleamed brightly through that grey atmosphere, and though to a young lady reared in Mayfair or Belgravia such shop-windows would have been unworthy of a glance, they were a snare and temptation for Bella. There were so many things that she longed for, and would never be able to buy.

Harbeck Street is apt to be empty at this dead season of the year, a long, long street, an endless perspective of eminently respectable houses. The Person's office was at the further end, and Bella looked down that long, grey vista almost despairingly, more tired than usual with the trudge from Walworth. As she looked, a carriage passed her, an old-fashioned, yellow chariot, on cee springs, drawn by a pair of high grey horses, with the stateliest of coachmen driving them, and a tall footman sitting by his side.

"It looks like the fairy god-mother's coach," thought Bella. "I shouldn't wonder if it began by being a pumpkin."

It was a surprise when she reached the Person's door to find the yellow chariot standing before it, and the tall footman waiting near the doorstep. She was almost afraid to go in and meet the owner of that splendid carriage. She had caught only a glimpse of its occupant as the chariot rolled by, a plumed bonnet, a patch of ermine.

The Person's smart page ushered her upstairs and knocked at the official door. "Miss Rolleston," he announced, apologetically, while Bella waited outside.

"Show her in," said the Person, quickly, and then Bella heard her murmuring something in a low voice to her client.

Bella went in fresh, blooming, a living image of youth and hope, and before she looked at the Person her gaze was riveted by the owner of the chariot.

Never had she seen anyone as old as the old lady sitting by the Person's fire: a little old figure, wrapped from chin to feet in an ermine mantle; a withered, old face under a plumed bonnet—a face so wasted by age that it seemed only a pair of eyes and a peaked chin. The nose was peaked, too, but between the sharply pointed chin and the great, shining eyes, the small, aquiline nose was hardly visible.

"This is Miss Rolleston, Lady Ducayne."

"LADY DUCAYNE."

Claw-like fingers, flashing with jewels, lifted a double eyeglass to Lady Ducayne's shining black eyes, and through the glasses Bella saw those unnaturally bright eyes magnified to a gigantic size, and glaring at her awfully.

"Miss Torpinter has told me all about you," said the old voice that belonged to the eyes. "Have you good health? Are you strong and active, able to eat well, sleep well, walk well, able to enjoy all that there is good in life?"

"I have never known what it is to be ill, or idle," answered Bella.

"Then I think you will do for me."

"Of course, in the event of references being perfectly satisfactory," put in the Person.

"I don't want references. The young woman looks frank and innocent. I'll take her on trust."

"So like you, dear Lady Ducayne," murmured Miss Torpinter.

"I want a strong young woman whose health will give me no trouble."

"You have been so unfortunate in that respect," cooed the Person, whose voice and manner were subdued to a melting sweetness by the old woman's presence.

"Yes, I've been rather unlucky," grunted Lady Ducayne.

"But I am sure Miss Rolleston will not disappoint you, though certainly after your unpleasant experience with Miss Tomson, who looked the picture of health—and Miss Blandy, who said she had never seen a doctor since she was vaccinated——"

"Lies, no doubt," muttered Lady Ducayne, and then turning to Bella, she asked, curtly, "You don't mind spending the winter in Italy, I suppose?"

In Italy! The very word was magical. Bella's fair young face flushed crimson.

"It has been the dream of my life to see Italy," she gasped.

From Walworth to Italy! How far, how impossible such a journey had seemed to that romantic dreamer.

"Well, your dream will be realized. Get yourself ready to leave Charing Cross by the train de luxe this day week at eleven. Be sure you are at the station a quarter before the hour. My people will look after you and your luggage."

Lady Ducayne rose from her chair, assisted by her crutch-stick, and Miss Torpinter escorted her to the door.

"And with regard to salary?" questioned the Person on the way.

"Salary, oh, the same as usual—and if the young woman wants a quarter's pay in advance you can write to me for a cheque," Lady Ducayne answered, carelessly.

Miss Torpinter went all the way downstairs with her client, and waited to see her seated in the yellow chariot. When she came upstairs again she was slightly out of breath, and she had resumed that superior manner which Bella had found so crushing.

"You may think yourself uncommonly lucky, Miss Rolleston," she said. "I have dozens of young ladies on my books whom I might have recommended for this situation—but I remembered having told you to call this afternoon—and I thought I would give you a chance. Old Lady Ducayne is one of the best people on my books. She gives her

companion a hundred a year, and pays all travelling expenses. You will live in the lap of luxury."

"A hundred a year! How too lovely! Shall I have to dress very grandly? Does Lady Ducayne keep much company?"

"At her age! No, she lives in seclusion—in her own apartments—her French maid, her footman, her medical attendant, her courier."

"Why did those other companions leave her?" asked Bella.

"Their health broke down!"

"Poor things, and so they had to leave?"

"Yes, they had to leave. I suppose you would like a quarter's salary in advance?"

"Oh, yes, please. I shall have things to buy."

"Very well, I will write for Lady Ducayne's cheque, and I will send you the balance—after deducting my commission for the year."

"To be sure, I had forgotten the commission."

"You don't suppose I keep this office for pleasure"

"Of course not," murmured Bella, remembering the five shillings entrance fee; but nobody could expect a hundred a year and a winter in Italy for five shillings.

III.

"From Miss Rolleston, at Cap Ferrino, to Mrs. Rolleston, in Beresford Street, Walworth.

"How I wish you could see this place, dearest; the blue sky, the olive woods, the orange and lemon orchards between the cliffs and the sea—sheltering in the hollow of the great hills—and with summer waves dancing up to the narrow ridge of pebbles and weeds which is the Italian idea of a beach! Oh, how I wish you could see it all, mother dear, and bask in this sunshine, that makes it so difficult to believe the date at the head of this paper. November! The air is like an English June—the sun is so hot that I can't walk a few yards without an umbrella. And to think of you at Walworth while I am here! I could cry at the thought that perhaps you will never see this lovely coast, this wonderful sea, these summer flowers that bloom in winter. There is a hedge of pink geraniums under my window, mother—a thick, rank hedge, as if the flowers grew wild—and there are Dijon roses climbing over arches and palisades all along the terrace—a rose garden full of bloom in November! Just picture it all! You could never imagine the luxury of this hotel. It is nearly new, and has been built and decorated regardless of expense. Our rooms are upholstered in pale blue satin, which shows up Lady Ducayne's parchment complexion, but as she sits all day in a corner of the balcony basking in the sun, except when she is in her carriage, and all the evening in her armchair close to the fire, and never sees anyone but her own people, her complexion matters very little.

"She has the handsomest suite of rooms in the hotel. My bedroom is inside hers, the sweetest room—all blue satin and white lace—white enamelled furniture, looking glasses on every wall, till I know my pert little profile as I never knew it before. The room was really meant for Lady Ducayne's dressing-room, but she ordered one of the blue satin couches to be arranged as a bed for me—the prettiest little bed, which I can wheel near the window on sunny mornings, as it is on castors and easily moved about. I feel as if Lady Ducayne were a funny old grandmother, who had suddenly appeared in my life, very, very rich, and very, very kind.

"She is not at all exacting. I read aloud to her a good deal, and she dozes and nods while I read. Sometimes I hear her moaning in her sleep—as if she had troublesome dreams. When she is tired of my reading she orders Francine, her maid, to read a French novel to her, and I hear her chuckle and groan now and then, as if she were more interested in those books than in Dickens or Scott. My French is not good enough to follow Francine, who reads very quickly. I have a great deal of liberty, for Lady Ducayne often tells me to run away and amuse myself; I roam about the hills for hours. Everything is so lovely. I lose myself in olive woods, always climbing up and up towards the pine woods above—and above the pines there are the snow mountains that just show their white peaks above the dark hills. Oh, you poor dear, how can I ever make you understand what this place is like—you, whose poor, tired eyes have only the opposite side of Beresford Street? Sometimes I go no farther than the terrace in front of the hotel, which is a favourite lounging place with everybody. The gardens lie below, and the tennis courts where I sometimes play with a very nice girl, the only person in the hotel with whom I have made friends. She is a year older than I, and has come to Cap Ferrino with her brother, a doctor—or a medical student, who is going to be a doctor. He passed his M.B. exam.

at Edinburgh just before they left home, Lotta told me He came to Italy entirely on his sister's account. She had a troublesome chest attack last summer and was ordered to winter abroad. They are orphans, quite alone in the world, and so fond of each other. It is very nice for me to have such a friend as Lotta. She is so thoroughly respectable. I can't help using that word, for some of the girls in this hotel go on in a way that I know you would shudder at Lotta was brought up by an aunt, deep down in the country, and knows hardly anything about life. Her brother won't allow her to read a novel, French or English, that he has not read and approved.

"'He treats me like a child,' she told me, 'but I don't mind, for it's nice to know somebody loves me, and cares about what I do, and even about my thoughts'

"Perhaps this is what makes some girls so eager to marry — the want of someone strong and brave and honest and true to care for them and order them about. I want no one, mother darling, for I have you, and you are all the world to me. No husband could ever come between us two. If I ever were to marry he would have only the second place in my heart. But I don't suppose I ever shall marry, or even know what it is like to have an offer of marriage. No young man can afford to marry a penniless girl nowadays. Life is too expensive.

"Mr. Stafford, Lotta's brother, is very clever, and very kind. He thinks it is rather hard for me to have to live with such an old woman as Lady Ducayne, but then he does not know how poor we are—you and I—and what a wonderful life this seems to me in this lovely place. I feel a selfish wretch for enjoying all my luxuries, while you, who want them so much more than I, have none of them—hardly know what they are like—do you, dearest?—for my scamp of a father began to go to the dogs soon after you were married, and since then life has been all trouble and care and struggle for you."

"IN THE OLIVE WOODS."

This letter was written when Bella had been less than a month at Cap Ferrino, before the novelty had worn off the landscape, and before the pleasure of luxurious surroundings had begun to cloy. She wrote to her mother every week, such long letters as girls who have lived in closest companionship with a mother alone can write, letters that are like a diary of heart and mind. She wrote gaily always, but when the new year began Mrs. Rolleston thought she detected a note of melancholy under all those lively details about the place and the people.

"My poor girl is getting home sick," she thought. "Her heart is in Beresford Street."

It might be that she missed her new friend and companion, Lotta Stafford, who had gone with her brother for a little tour to Genoa and Spezzia, and as far as Pisa. They were to return before February, but in the meantime Bella might naturally feel very solitary among all those strangers, whose manners and doings she described so well.

The mother's instinct had been true. Bella was not so happy as she had been in that first flush of wonder and delight which followed the change from Walworth to the Riviera. Somehow, she knew not how, lassitude had crept upon her. She no longer loved to climb the hills, no longer flourished her orange stick in sheer gladness of heart as her light feet skipped over the rough ground and the coarse grass on the mountain side. The odour of rosemary and thyme, the fresh breath of the sea, no longer filled her

with rapture. She thought of Beresford Street and her mother's face with a sick longing They were so far—so far away! And then she thought of Lady Ducayne, sitting by the heaped-up olive logs in the over-heated salon —thought of that wizened-nut cracker profile, and those gleaming eyes, with an invincible horror.

Visitors at the hotel had told her that the air of Cap Ferrino was relaxing — better suited to age than to youth, to sickness than to health. No doubt it was so. She was not so well as she had been at Walworth; but she told herself that she was suffering only from the pain of separation from the dear companion of her girlhood, the mother who had been nurse, sister, friend, flatterer, all things in this world to her. She had shed many tears over that parting, had spent many a melancholy hour on the marble terrace with yearning eyes looking westward, and with her heart's desire a thousand miles away.

She was sitting in her favourite spot, an angle at the eastern end of the terrace, a quiet little nook sheltered by orange trees, when she heard a couple of Riviera habitués talking in the garden below. They were sitting on a bench against the terrace wall

She had no idea of listening to their talk, till the sound of Lady Ducayne's name attracted her, and then she listened without any thought of wrong-doing They were talking no secrets—just casually discussing an hotel acquaintance.

They were two elderly people whom Bella only knew by sight. An English clergyman who had wintered abroad for half his life-time, a stout, comfortable, well-to-do spinster, whose chronic bronchitis obliged her to migrate annually.

"I have met her about Italy for the last ten years," said the lady; "but have never found out her real age."

"I put her down at a hundred—not a year less," replied the parson. "Her reminiscences all go back to the Regency. She was evidently then in her zenith, and I have heard her say things that showed she was in Parisian society when the First Empire was at its best—before Josephine was divorced."

"She doesn't talk much now."

"No; there's not much life left in her. She is wise in keeping herself secluded. I only wonder that wicked old quack, her Italian doctor, didn't finish her off years ago."

"I should think it must be the other way, and that he keeps her alive."

"My dear Miss Manders, do you think foreign quackery ever kept anybody alive?"

"Well, there she is—and she never goes anywhere without him. He certainly has an unpleasant countenance."

"Unpleasant," echoed the parson, "I don't believe the foul fiend himself can beat him in ugliness. I pity that poor young woman who has to live between old Lady Ducayne and Dr Parravicini."

"But the old lady is very good to her companions."

"No doubt. She is very free with her cash; the servants call her good Lady Ducayne. She is a withered old female Crœsus, and knows she'll never be able to get through her money, and doesn't relish the idea of other people enjoying it when she's in her coffin. People who live to be as old as she is become slavishly attached to life. I daresay she's generous to those poor girls—but she can't make them happy. They die in her service."

"Don't say they, Mr. Carton, I know that one poor girl died at Mentone last spring."

"Yes, and another poor girl died in Rome three years ago I was there at the time. Good Lady Ducayne left her there in an English family. The girl had every comfort. The old woman was very liberal to her—but she died. I tell you, Miss Manders, it is not good for any young woman to live with two such horrors as Lady Ducayne and Parravicini."

They talked of other things—but Bella hardly heard them. She sat motionless, and a cold wind seemed to come down upon her from the mountains and to creep up to her from the sea, till she shivered as she sat there in the sunshine, in the shelter of the orange trees in the midst of all that beauty and brightness.

Yes, they were uncanny, certainly, the pair of them—she so like an aristocratic witch in her withered old age, he of no particular age, with a face that was more like a waxen mask than any human countenance Bella had ever seen What did it matter? Old age is venerable, and worthy of all reverence; and Lady Ducayne had been very kind to her. Dr Parravicini was a harmless, inoffensive student, who seldom looked up from the book he was reading He had his private sitting-room, where he made experiments in chemistry and natural science—perhaps in alchemy What could it matter to Bella? He had always been polite to her, in his far-off way. She could not be more

"WITH YEARNING EYES LOOKING WESTWARD."

happily placed than she was—in this palatial hotel, with this rich old lady

No doubt she missed the young English girl who had been so friendly, and it might be that she missed the girl's brother, for Mr. Stafford had talked to her a good deal—had interested himself in the books she was reading, and her manner of amusing herself when she was not on duty.

"You must come to our little salon when you are 'off,' as the hospital nurses call it, and we can have some music. No doubt you play and sing?" upon which Bella had to own with a blush of shame that she had forgotten how to play the piano ages ago.

"Mother and I used to sing duets sometimes between the lights, without accompaniment," she said, and the tears came into her eyes as she thought of the humble room, the half-hour's respite from work, the sewing-machine standing where a piano ought to have been, and her mother's plaintive voice, so sweet, so true, so dear

Sometimes she found herself wondering whether she would ever see that beloved mother again. Strange forebodings came into her mind. She was angry with herself for giving way to melancholy thoughts.

One day she questioned Lady Ducayne's French maid about those two companions who had died within three years.

"They were poor, feeble creatures," Francine told her "They looked fresh and bright enough when they came to Miladi, but they ate too much, and they were lazy. They died of luxury and idleness. Miladi was too kind to them. They had nothing to do; and so they took to fancying things; fancying the air didn't suit them, that they couldn't sleep"

"I sleep well enough, but I have had a strange dream several times since I have been in Italy"

"Ah, you had better not begin to think about dreams, or you will be like those other girls. They were dreamers—and they dreamt themselves into the cemetery."

The dream troubled her a little, not because it was a ghastly or frightening dream, but on account of sensations which she had never felt before in sleep—a whirring of wheels that went round in her brain, a great noise like a whirlwind, but rhythmical like the ticking of a gigantic clock—and then in the midst of this uproar as of winds and waves she seemed to sink into a gulf of unconsciousness, out of sleep into far deeper sleep—total extinction. And then, after that blank interval, there had come the sound of voices, and then again the whirr of wheels, louder and louder—and again the blank—and then she knew no more till morning, when she awoke, feeling languid and oppressed.

She told Dr. Parravicini of her dream one day, on the only occasion when she wanted his professional advice. She had suffered rather severely from the mosquitoes before Christmas—and had been almost frightened at finding a wound upon her arm which she could only attribute to the venomous sting of one of these torturers. Parravicini put on his glasses, and scrutinized the angry mark on the round, white arm, as Bella stood before

him and Lady Ducayne with her sleeve rolled up above her elbow.

"Yes, that's rather more than a joke," he said, "he has caught you on the top of a vein. What a vampire! But there's no harm done, signorina, nothing that a little dressing of mine won't heal. You must always show me any bite of this nature. It might be dangerous if neglected. These creatures feed on poison and disseminate it."

"And to think that such tiny creatures can bite like this," said Bella, "my arm looks as if it had been cut by a knife."

"If I were to show you a mosquito's sting under my microscope you wouldn't be surprised at that," replied Parravicini.

Bella had to put up with the mosquito bites, even when they came on the top of a vein, and produced that ugly wound. The wound recurred now and then at longish intervals, and Bella found Dr. Parravicini's dressing a speedy cure. If he were the quack his enemies called him, he had at least a light hand and a delicate touch in performing this small operation.

"Bella Rolleston to Mrs. Rolleston.—April 14th.

"EVER DEAREST,—Behold the cheque for my second quarter's salary—five and twenty pounds. There is no one to pinch off a whole tenner for a year's commission as there was last time, so it is all for you, mother, dear. I have plenty of pocket-money in hand from the cash I brought away with me, when you insisted on my keeping more than I wanted. It isn't possible to spend money here—except on occasional tips to servants, or sous to beggars and children—unless one had lots to spend, for everything one would like to buy—tortoise-shell, coral, lace—is so ridiculously dear that only a millionaire ought to look at it. Italy is a dream of beauty; but for shopping, give me Newington Causeway.

"You ask me so earnestly if I am quite well that I fear my letters must have been very dull lately. Yes, dear, I am well—but I am not quite so strong as I was when I used to trudge to the West end to buy half a pound of tea—just for a constitutional walk—or to Dulwich to look at the pictures. Italy is relaxing; and I feel what the people here call 'slack.' But I fancy I can see your dear face looking worried as you read this. Indeed, and indeed, I am not ill. I am only a little tired of this lovely scene—as I suppose one might get tired of looking at one of Turner's pictures if it hung on a wall that was always opposite one. I think of you every hour in every day—think of you and our homely little room—our dear little shabby parlour, with the arm-chairs from the wreck of your old home, and Dick singing in his cage over the sewing machine. Dear, shrill, maddening Dick, who, we flattered ourselves, was so passionately fond of us. Do tell me in your next that he is well.

"My friend Lotta and her brother never came back after all. They went from Pisa to Rome. Happy mortals! And they are to be on the Italian lakes in May; which lake was not decided when Lotta last wrote to me. She has been a charming correspondent, and has confided all her little flirtations to me. We are all to go to Bellaggio next week—by Genoa and Milan. Isn't that lovely? Lady Ducayne travels by the easiest stages—except when she is bottled up in the tram de luxe. We shall stop two days at Genoa and one at Milan. What a bore I shall be to you with my talk about Italy when I come home.

"Love and love—and ever more love from your adoring, BELLA."

IV

HERBERT STAFFORD and his sister had often talked of the pretty English girl with her fresh complexion, which made such a pleasant touch of rosy colour among all those sallow faces at the Grand Hotel. The young doctor thought of her with a compassionate tenderness—her utter loneliness in that great hotel where there were so many people, her bondage to that old, old woman, where everybody else was free to think of nothing but enjoying life. It was a hard fate, and the poor child was evidently devoted to her mother, and felt the pain of separation—"only two of them, and very poor, and all the world to each other," he thought.

Lotta told him one morning that they were to meet again at Bellaggio. "The old thing and her court are to be there before we are," she said. "I shall be charmed to have Bella again. She is so bright and gay—in spite of an occasional touch of home-sickness. I never took to a girl on a short acquaintance as I did to her."

"I like her best when she is home-sick," said Herbert, "for then I am sure she has a heart."

"What have you to do with hearts, except for dissection? Don't forget that Bella is an absolute pauper. She told me in confidence that her mother makes mantles for a West end shop. You can hardly have a lower depth than that."

"I shouldn't think any less of her if her mother made match-boxes."

"WHAT A VAMPIRE!"

"Not in the abstract—of course not. Match boxes are honest labour. But you couldn't marry a girl whose mother makes mantles."

"We haven't come to the consideration of that question yet," answered Herbert, who liked to provoke his sister.

In two years' hospital practice he had seen too much of the grim realities of life to retain any prejudices about rank. Cancer, phthisis, gangrene, leave a man with little respect for the outward differences which vary the husk of humanity. The kernel is always the same—fearfully and wonderfully made—a subject for pity and terror.

Mr. Stafford and his sister arrived at Bellaggio in a fair May evening. The sun was going down as the steamer approached the pier, and all that glory of purple bloom which curtains every wall at this season of the year flushed and deepened in the glowing light. A group of ladies were standing on the pier watching the arrivals, and among them Herbert saw a pale face that startled him out of his wonted composure.

"There she is," murmured Lotta, at his elbow, "but how dreadfully changed. She looks a wreck."

They were shaking hands with her a few minutes later, and a flush had lighted up her poor pinched face in the pleasure of meeting.

"I thought you might come this evening," she said. "We have been here a week."

She did not add that she had been there every evening to watch the boat in, and a good many times during the day. The Grand Bretagne was close by, and it had been easy for her to creep to the pier when the boat bell rang. She felt a joy in meeting these people again, a sense of being with friends, a confidence which Lady Ducayne's goodness had never inspired in her.

"Oh, you poor darling, how awfully ill you must have been," exclaimed Lotta, as the two girls embraced.

Bella tried to answer, but her voice was choked with tears.

"What has been the matter, dear? That horrid influenza, I suppose?"

"No, no, I have not been ill—I have only felt a little weaker than I used to be. I don't think the air of Cap Ferrino quite agreed with me."

"It must have disagreed with you abominably. I never saw such a change in anyone. Do let Herbert doctor you. He is fully qualified, you know. He prescribed for ever so many influenza patients at the Londres. They were glad to get advice from an English doctor in a friendly way."

"I am sure he must be very clever!" faltered Bella, "but there is really nothing the matter. I am not ill, and if I were ill, Lady Ducayne's physician——"

"That dreadful man with the yellow face? I would as soon one of the Borgias prescribed for me. I hope you haven't been taking any of his medicines."

"No, dear, I have taken nothing. I have never complained of being ill."

This was said while they were all three walking to the hotel. The Staffords' rooms had been secured in advance, pretty ground-floor rooms, opening into the garden. Lady Ducayne's stately apartments were on the floor above.

"I believe these rooms are just under ours," said Bella.

"Then it will be all the easier for you to run down to us," replied Lotta, which was not really the case, as the grand staircase was in the centre of the hotel.

"Oh, I shall find it easy enough," said Bella. "I'm afraid you'll have too much of

my society. Lady Ducayne sleeps away half the day in this warm weather, so I have a good deal of idle time, and I get awfully moped thinking of mother and home."

Her voice broke upon the last word. She could not have thought of that poor lodging which went by the name of home more tenderly had it been the most beautiful that art and wealth ever created. She moped and pined in this lovely garden, with the sunlit lake and the romantic hills spreading out their beauty before her. She was home sick and she had dreams: or, rather, an occasional recurrence of that one bad dream with all its strange sensations — it was more like a hallucination than dreaming—the whirring of wheels; the sinking into an abyss; the struggling back to consciousness. She had the dream shortly before she left Cap Ferrino, but not since she had come to Bellaggio, and she began to hope the air in this lake district suited her better, and that those strange sensations would never return.

Mr. Stafford wrote a prescription and had it made up at the chemist's near the hotel. It was a powerful tonic, and after two bottles, and a row or two on the lake, and some rambling over the hills and in the meadows where the spring flowers made earth seem paradise, Bella's spirits and looks improved as if by magic.

"It is a wonderful tonic," she said, but perhaps in her heart of hearts she knew that the doctor's kind voice, and the friendly hand that helped her in and out of the boat, and the watchful care that went with her by land and lake, had something to do with her cure.

"I hope you don't forget that her mother makes mantles," Lotta said, warningly.

"Or match-boxes: it is just the same thing, so far as I am concerned."

"You mean that in no circumstances could you think of marrying her?"

"I mean that if ever I love a woman well enough to think of marrying her, riches or rank will count for nothing with me. But I fear—I fear your poor friend may not live to be any man's wife."

"Do you think her so very ill?"

He sighed, and left the question unanswered.

One day, while they were gathering wild hyacinths in an upland meadow, Bella told Mr. Stafford about her bad dream.

"It is curious only because it is hardly like a dream," she said. "I daresay you could find some common-sense reason for it. The position of my head on my pillow, or the atmosphere, or something."

And then she described her sensations, how in the midst of sleep there came a sudden sense of suffocation; and then those whirring wheels, so loud, so terrible; and then a blank, and then a coming back to waking consciousness.

"Have you ever had chloroform given you—by a dentist, for instance?"

"Never—Dr. Parravicini asked me that question one day."

"Lately?"

"No, long ago, when we were in the train de luxe."

"Has Dr. Parravicini prescribed for you since you began to feel weak and ill?"

"Oh, he has given me a tonic from time to time, but I hate medicine, and took very little of the stuff. And then I am not ill, only weaker than I used to be. I was ridiculously strong and well when I lived at Walworth, and used to take long walks every day. Mother made me take those tramps to Dulwich or Norwood, for fear I should suffer from too much sewing-machine, sometimes—but very seldom—she went with me. She was generally toiling at home while I was enjoying fresh air and exercise. And she was very careful about our food—that, however plain it was, it should be always nourishing and ample. I owe it to her care that I grew up such a great, strong creature."

"You don't look great or strong now, you poor dear," said Lotta.

"I'm afraid Italy doesn't agree with me."

"Perhaps it is not Italy, but being cooped up with Lady Ducayne that has made you ill."

"But I am never cooped up. Lady Ducayne is absurdly kind, and lets me roam about or sit in the balcony all day if I like. I have read more novels since I have been with her than in all the rest of my life."

"Then she is very different from the average old lady, who is usually a slave-driver," said Stafford. "I wonder why she carries a companion about with her if she has so little need of society."

"Oh, I am only part of her state. She is inordinately rich—and the salary she gives me doesn't count. Apropos of Dr. Parravicini, I know he is a clever doctor, for he cures my horrid mosquito bites."

"A little ammonia would do that, in the early stage of the mischief. But there are no mosquitoes to trouble you now."

"Oh, yes, there are. I had a bite just before we left Cap Ferrino."

She pushed up her loose lawn sleeve, and exhibited a scar, which he scrutinized intently, with a surprised and puzzled look.

"This is no mosquito bite," he said.

"Oh, yes it is—unless there are snakes or adders at Cap Ferrino."

"It is not a bite at all. You are trifling with me. Miss Rolleston—you have allowed that wretched Italian quack to bleed you. They killed the greatest man in modern Europe that way, remember. How very foolish of you."

"I was never bled in my life, Mr. Stafford."

"Nonsense! Let me look at your other arm. Are there any more mosquito bites?"

"Yes; Dr. Parravicini says I have a bad skin for healing, and that the poison acts more virulently with me than with most people."

Stafford examined both her arms in the broad sunlight, scars new and old.

"You have been very badly bitten, Miss Rolleston," he said, "and if ever I find the mosquito I shall make him smart. But, now tell me, my dear girl, on your word of honour, tell me as you would tell a friend who is sincerely anxious for your health and happiness—as you would tell your mother if she were here to question you—have you no knowledge of any cause for these scars except mosquito bites—no suspicion even?"

"No, indeed! No, upon my honour! I have never seen a mosquito biting my arm. One never does see the horrid little fiends. But I have heard them trumpeting under the curtains, and I know that I have often had one of the pestilent wretches buzzing about me."

Later in the day Bella and her friends were sitting at tea in the garden, while Lady Ducayne took her afternoon drive with her doctor.

"How long do you mean to stop with Lady Ducayne, Miss Rolleston?" Herbert Stafford asked, after a thoughtful silence, breaking suddenly upon the trivial talk of the two girls.

"As long as she will go on paying me twenty-five pounds a quarter."

"Even if you feel your health breaking down in her service?"

"It is not the service that has injured my health. You can see that I have really nothing to do—to read aloud for an hour or so once or twice a week, to write a letter once in a way to a London tradesman. I shall never have such an easy time with anybody else. And nobody else would give me a hundred a year."

"Then you mean to go on till you break down, to die at your post?"

"Like the other two companions? No! If ever I feel seriously ill—really ill—I shall put myself in a train and go back to Walworth without stopping."

"What about the other two companions?"

"They both died. It was very unlucky for Lady Ducayne. That's why she engaged me; she chose me because I was ruddy and robust. She must feel rather disgusted at my having grown white and weak. By-the-bye, when I told her about the good your tonic had done me, she said she would like to see you and have a little talk with you about her own case."

"And I should like to see Lady Ducayne. When did she say this?"

"The day before yesterday."

"Will you ask her if she will see me this evening?"

"With pleasure! I wonder what you will think of her? She looks rather terrible to a stranger; but Dr. Parravicini says she was once a famous beauty."

It was nearly ten o'clock when Mr. Stafford was summoned by message from Lady Ducayne, whose courier came to conduct him to her ladyship's salon. Bella was reading aloud when the visitor was admitted; and he noticed the languor in the low, sweet tones, the evident effort.

"Shut up the book," said the querulous old voice. "You are beginning to drawl like Miss Blandy."

Stafford saw a small, bent figure crouching over the piled up olive logs, a shrunken old figure in a gorgeous garment of black and crimson brocade, a skinny throat emerging from a mass of old Venetian lace, clasped with diamonds that flashed like fire-flies as the trembling old head turned towards him.

The eyes that looked at him out of the face were almost as bright as the diamonds—the only living feature in that narrow parchment mask. He had seen terrible faces in the hospital—faces on which disease had set dreadful marks—but he had never seen a face that impressed him so painfully as this withered countenance, with its indescribable horror of death outlived, a face that should have been hidden under a coffin-lid years and years ago.

The Italian physician was standing on the other side of the fireplace, smoking a cigarette, and looking down at the little old woman brooding over the hearth as if he were proud of her.

"Good evening, Mr. Stafford; you can go

to your room, Bella, and write your everlasting letter to your mother at Walworth," said Lady Ducayne. "I believe she writes a page about every wild flower she discovers in the woods and meadows. I don't know what else she can find to write about," she added, as Bella quietly withdrew to the pretty little bedroom opening out of Lady Ducayne's spacious apartment. Here, as at Cap Ferrino, she slept in a room adjoining the old lady's.

"You are a medical man, I understand, Mr Stafford."

"I am a qualified practitioner, but I have not begun to practise."

"You have begun upon my companion, she tells me."

"I have prescribed for her, certainly, and I am happy to find my prescription has done her good; but I look upon that improvement as temporary. Her case will require more drastic treatment."

"Never mind her case. There is nothing the matter with the girl—absolutely nothing—except girlish nonsense; too much liberty and not enough work."

an impatient jerk, and then at Parravicini, whose yellow complexion had paled a little under Stafford's scrutiny.

"Don't bother me about my companions, sir," said Lady Ducayne. "I sent for you to consult you about myself—not about a parcel of anæmic girls. You are young, and medicine is a progressive science, the newspapers tell me. Where have you studied?"

"In Edinburgh—and in Paris."

"Two good schools. And you know all the new-fangled theories, the modern discoveries—that remind one of the mediæval witchcraft, of Albertus Magnus, and George Ripley, you have studied hypnotism—electricity?"

"And the transfusion of blood," said Stafford, very slowly, looking at Parravicini.

"Have you made any discovery that teaches you to prolong human life—any elixir—any mode of treatment? I want my life prolonged, young man. That man there has been my physician for thirty years. He does all he can to keep me alive—after his lights. He studies all the new theories of all the scientists—but he is old, he gets older every

"HIS BRAIN POWER IS GOING."

"I understand that two of your ladyship's previous companions died of the same disease," said Stafford, looking first at Lady Ducayne, who gave her tremulous old head

day—his brain-power is going—he is bigoted—prejudiced—can't receive new ideas—can't grapple with new systems. He will let me die if I am not on my guard against him."

"You are of an unbelievable ingratitude, Eccllenza," said Parravicini.

"Oh, you needn't complain. I have paid you thousands to keep me alive. Every year of my life has swollen your hoards; you know there is nothing to come to you when I am gone. My whole fortune is left to endow a home for indigent women of quality who have reached their ninetieth year. Come, Mr. Stafford, I am a rich woman. Give me a few years more in the sunshine, a few years more above ground, and I will give you the price of a fashionable London practice—I will set you up at the West-end."

"How old are you, Lady Ducayne?"

"I was born the day Louis XVI. was guillotined."

"Then I think you have had your share of the sunshine and the pleasures of the earth, and that you should spend your few remaining days in repenting your sins and trying to make atonement for the young lives that have been sacrificed to your love of life."

"What do you mean by that, sir?"

"Oh, Lady Ducayne, need I put your wickedness and your physician's still greater wickedness in plain words? The poor girl who is now in your employment has been reduced from robust health to a condition of absolute danger by Dr. Parravicini's experimental surgery; and I have no doubt those other two young women who broke down in your service were treated by him in the same manner. I could take upon myself to demonstrate—by most convincing evidence, to a jury of medical men—that Dr. Parravicini has been bleeding Miss Rolleston, after putting her under chloroform, at intervals, ever since she has been in your service. The deterioration in the girl's health speaks for itself, the lancet marks upon the girl's arms are unmistakable; and her description of a series of sensations, which she calls a dream, points unmistakably to the administration of chloroform while she was sleeping. A practice so nefarious, so murderous, must, if exposed, result in a sentence only less severe than the punishment of murder."

"I laugh," said Parravicini, with an airy motion of his skinny fingers; "I laugh at once at your theories and at your threats. I, Parravicini Leopold, have no fear that the law can question anything I have done."

"Take the girl away, and let me hear no more of her," cried Lady Ducayne, in the thin, old voice which so poorly matched the energy and fire of the wicked old brain that guided its utterances. "Let her go back to her mother—I want no more girls to die in my service. There are girls enough and to spare in the world, God knows."

"If you ever engage another companion—or take another English girl into your service, Lady Ducayne, I will make all England ring with the story of your wickedness."

"I want no more girls. I don't believe in his experiments. They have been full of danger for me as well as for the girl—an air bubble, and I should be gone. I'll have no more of his dangerous quackery. I'll find some new man—a better man than you, sir, a discoverer like Pasteur, or Virchow, a genius—to keep me alive. Take your girl away, young man. Marry her if you like. I'll write her a cheque for a thousand pounds, and let her go and live on beef and beer, and get strong and plump again. I'll have no more such experiments. Do you hear, Parravicini?" she screamed, vindictively, the yellow, wrinkled face distorted with fury, the eyes glaring at him.

The Staffords carried Bella Rolleston off to Varese next day, she very loth to leave Lady Ducayne, whose liberal salary afforded such help for the dear mother. Herbert Stafford insisted, however, treating Bella as coolly as if he had been the family physician, and she had been given over wholly to his care.

"Do you suppose your mother would let you stop here to die?" he asked. "If Mrs. Rolleston knew how ill you are, she would come post haste to fetch you."

"I shall never be well again till I get back to Walworth," answered Bella, who was low spirited and inclined to tears this morning, a reaction after her good spirits of yesterday.

"We'll try a week or two at Varese first," said Stafford. "When you can walk half way up Monte Generoso without palpitation of the heart, you shall go back to Walworth."

"Poor mother, how glad she will be to see me, and how sorry that I've lost such a good place."

This conversation took place on the boat when they were leaving Bellaggio. Lotta had gone to her friend's room at seven o'clock that morning, long before Lady Ducayne's withered eyelids had opened to the daylight, before even Francine, the French maid, was astir, and had helped to pack a Gladstone bag with essentials, and hustled Bella downstairs and out of doors before she could make any strenuous resistance.

"It's all right," Lotta assured her. "Herbert had a good talk with Lady Ducayne last night, and it was settled for you to leave this morning. She doesn't like invalids, you see."

"No," sighed Bella, "she doesn't like invalids. It was very unlucky that I should break down, just like Miss Tomson and Miss Blandy."

"At any rate, you are not dead, like them," answered Lotta, "and my brother says you are not going to die."

It seemed rather a dreadful thing to be dismissed in that off-hand way, without a word of farewell from her employer.

"I wonder what Miss Torpinter will say when I go to her for another situation," Bella speculated, ruefully, while she and her friends were breakfasting on board the steamer.

"Perhaps you may never want another situation," said Stafford.

"You mean that I may never be well enough to be useful to anybody?"

"No, I don't mean anything of the kind."

It was after dinner at Varese, when Bella had been induced to take a whole glass of Chianti, and quite sparkled after that unaccustomed stimulant, that Mr Stafford produced a letter from his pocket.

"I forgot to give you Lady Ducayne's letter of adieu!" he said.

"What, did she write to me? I am so glad—I hated to leave her in such a cool way, for after all she was very kind to me, and if I didn't like her it was only because she was too dreadfully old."

She tore open the envelope. The letter was short and to the point:—

"Good-bye, child. Go and marry your doctor. I inclose a farewell gift for your trousseau.—ADELINE DUCAYNE."

"A hundred pounds, a whole year's salary—no—why, it's for a—'A cheque for a thousand!'" cried Bella. "What a generous old soul! She really is the dearest old thing."

"A CHEQUE FOR A THOUSAND!"

"She just missed being very dear to you, Bella," said Stafford.

He had dropped into the use of her Christian name while they were on board the boat. It seemed natural now that she was to be in his charge till they all three went back to England.

"I shall take upon myself the privileges of an elder brother till we land at Dover," he said; "after that—well, it must be as you please."

The question of their future relations must have been satisfactorily settled before they crossed the Channel, for Bella's next letter to her mother communicated three startling facts.

First, that the inclosed cheque for £1,000 was to be invested in debenture stock in Mrs. Rolleston's name, and was to be her very own, income and principal, for the rest of her life.

Next, that Bella was going home to Walworth immediately.

And last, that she was going to be married to Mr. Herbert Stafford in the following autumn.

"And I am sure you will adore him, mother, as much as I do," wrote Bella. "It is all good Lady Ducayne's doing. I never could have married if I had not secured that little nest-egg for you. Herbert says we shall be able to add to it as the years go by, and that wherever we live there shall be always a room in our house for you. The word 'mother-in-law' has no terrors for him."

THE WITCH-DANCER'S DOOM

A BRETON LEGEND.

I

LONG, long ago, in the days of good King Arthur, Count Morriss dwelt in the old château of La Roche Morice, near Landerneau, in Brittany With him lived his beautiful niece, Katel Although charming in face and figure, this maiden had a somewhat uncanny reputation For it was said—and with reason—that she was a witch

The Count had often urged Katel to marry, but in vain The lady had no mind to lose her freedom Dancing was the one passion of her life. "When," said she, "I can find a knight who shall be able to dance continuously with me for twelve hours, with no break, to him I promise to give my hand!"

This scornful challenge was proclaimed by heralds in every neighbouring town and hamlet. In response came many wooers to attempt the impossible task. Those whom Katel favoured she made her partners at the rustic fêtes and open-air dances which were then in vogue. In the soft swarded meadows, by sunlight or starlight, the dancers would meet, and, to the dreamy music of the pipes, eager couples would whirl until the hills around began to blush in the light of the early dawn The wildest, giddiest, yet most graceful of the throng was Katel, who danced madly on until one by one her partners sank fainting upon the ground, and death released them from the heartless sorceress who had lured them into her toils

Thus perished many suitors, until the cruel maiden became an object of general hatred and horror. When her doings came to the ears of the count, he sternly forbade her to attend any more of the dances. In order to enforce her obedience, he shut her up in a tower, where, said he, she was to remain until she should choose a husband from among such suitors as still persisted in offering her marriage.

Now, Katel had a wizened little page, no bigger than a leveret, and as black as a raven's wing This creature she summoned to her one morning before dawn, and, with her finger at her lips, she said to him: "Be swift and silent! My uncle still slumbers. Get thee gone by the ladder, and hie thee to the castle of Salaün, who is waiting for a message from her he loves The guards will allow thee to pass; take horse, ride like the wind, and tell Salaun that Katel calls him to deliver her from this tower before the day dawns."

The infatuated young knight obeyed the summons immediately In an hour's time he was assisting the lady to mount his horse, after having got her in safety down the rope-ladder As, from the window of the donjon, the dwarf watched them ride away, he chuckled to himself:—

"Ha! ha! And so they are off to the great ball held to-day in the Martyrs' Meadow! Ah, my dear Salaun! before

another sun shall rise, your death-knell will be tolled!"

II.

WHEN Katel and her gallant cavalier arrived at the Martyrs' Meadow, they excited general surprise and admiration. Some, however, shook their heads forebodingly, as they heard that Salaün, now Katel's affianced lover, was to be her partner, for they knew that the brave young knight must needs fall a victim to her spell.

The ball began. Some of the most skilful pipers in the land had been engaged for the occasion, and they played gavottes, rondes, courantes, and many other dances, without intermission. But Katel waited until night came and the torches were lit. Then she took Salaun's hand, and they began to dance together.

"Round again! Once more! Ha! ha!" laughed the witch-maiden, as they spun along. "What! are you tired already? Do you give in so soon as this?"

"Never—while I am with *you!*" was the fervent reply. The fatal spell had begun to work.

Thus on they whirled, yet more swiftly than before, so that the other dancers stood aside to watch them. After a time, however, Katel observed that her partner was gradually becoming weaker, and that he would soon be unable to keep pace with her.

"Courage!" exclaimed she, in a bantering tone. "We cannot stop yet, it wants but a very short time to midnight, and then I shall be yours!"

KATEL SEDUCES AWAY

Salaün, although almost exhausted, strained every nerve and muscle in a frantic, final effort to continue the dance. Round the field they flew, at lightning speed; but it was for the last time. The knight's knees shook—his breath came more quickly—then with difficulty he gasped out the words—

"Oh, Katel! have mercy! I can do no more! Katel, my love, have I not won you yet?"

But as he sank lifeless upon the grass, Katel turned coldly away. His fate was nothing to her. At that moment the clock in a neighbouring tower struck twelve. All the lights flickered and expired; darkness reigned supreme. And through the darkness, shrilling high above every other sound, rang the mocking laugh of the impish dwarf.

III.

"WHAT!" exclaimed Katel, derisively, glancing angrily at the worn-out pipers, who had at last paused in their wild music, "exhausted already by such slight exertions? I wish the Evil One would send me some musicians and dancers worthy of me! Of what use are these miserable, puny creatures?"

As she uttered the words, stamping her foot in her fury, a weird, red light gleamed in the sky; there was a terrible peal of thunder, and a strange stir in the trees. Then suddenly, in the centre of the field, appeared two phantom forms, at the sight of whom the panic stricken by-standers would fain have fled. To their

horror, however, they found flight impossible; they were rooted to the spot!

One of the phantoms was attired in a red garment, covered with a black cloak. Beneath his arm he held a large double pipe, coiled around which were five hissing, writhing serpents. The other stranger, who was exceedingly tall, was dressed in a tightly fitting black suit, and heavy, red mantle, while upon his head waved an imposing tuft of vultures' plumes.

The ghostly piper began at once to play an unearthly dance-tune, so wild and maddening that it made all the hearers tremble. His tall, grim companion seized Katel by the waist, and the couple whirled round to the mad measure, which grew ever faster and more furious. In an instant the torches were re-lit. A few others joined in the dance; not for long, however. Katel and her phantom were soon the only dancers. Shriller still shrieked the pipes, faster yet grew the music, more and more swiftly spun the feet. Ere long the witch-maiden felt that her strength was deserting her; the torches swam before her eyes, and, in the last extremity of terror, she struggled to release herself from the iron grip which held her so relentlessly.

"What! so soon tired?" cried the spectre, jeering at her. "Do you give in so soon as this? Come! round once more! Ha! ha!"

Thus was Katel treated as she had treated others. She had no breath left wherewith to answer, her last hour had come. She made one more wild, despairing bound, then fell to the ground in the throes of death. At the same moment, the phantoms vanished.

"THE COUPLE WHIRLED ROUND TO THE MAD MEASURE"

There was a vivid lightning blaze, a terrific crash of thunder; then fell black darkness, hiding everything. A tempestuous wind arose, and rain fell in torrents.

When the storm had cleared, and the morning sun shone out, those who found courage to visit the spot beheld the forms of Katel and her lover Salaun lying dead upon the shrivelled turf.

Ever since that time, the spot has been shunned by all, and still, by their firesides on the winter nights, the peasants tell the tale of Katel, the witch-dancer, and her fearful fate.

By Robert Barr

HE was a good little boy, was Tom, a quiet, thoughtful, nice little fellow, who never gave his parents any trouble, and never got into mischief; in fact, just such another boy as the lad who is reading this story. He lived a long time ago in a small cottage, with his father and mother, who had no other children. His father was a working man, and his mother had to work also, for they kept no servant.

One afternoon his mother went out to meet his father, and said she could not take Tom along with her because it looked so much like rain. She knew that Tom would not be frightened at being left alone in the house, for he was a lonely little boy, and not used to having companions. He was afraid of only one thing, and that was thunder. When the thunder rolled and crashed, Tom was apt to become rather pale, and to be even more silent than usual. However, he was not in the least frightened of the lightning, and loved to watch it from the window. If it were not for the curious coincidence that thunder always accompanied the lightning, he would have enjoyed the storm exceedingly. But as it was, the pleasure he had in looking at the lightning was almost counterbalanced by his fear of the thunder.

For some time after his mother left him, Tom gazed out of the window until he noticed it was growing dark. Then he heard the distant rumble of the thunder, and he did not like it. He kept saying to himself, "Mamma, mamma, mamma," as if there were comfort in the reiteration of the word, and he hoped she would hurry home when she saw the storm coming on. Suddenly the dark sky was lit by a vivid flash of lightning, and the thunder rolled heavily and nearer. There was an interval of darkness, then the whole sky became a dome of flame, the thunder crashing quickly after it.

Poor Tom turned away from the window and sat down in the middle of the room. He admitted to himself that he was very much frightened, but thought he was not crying, although he could not account to himself for the tears that steadily flowed down his cheeks. There was an ominous silence for a few minutes, then the room became filled with an intense, quivering light, and the world seemed to split in two with the most awful crash Tom had ever heard. Tom would have shrieked with fear had it not been for a strange thing that

immediately happened, and which riveted his attention. All the blinding light in the room concentrated in one spot, near the place he was sitting. At first he thought it was a huge ball of fire, but as he looked closer he saw that it was a grotesque human shape, such as he had seen in fairy picture-books, only, in this case, the shape seemed to be made of glowing melting fire. Sparks shot from its eyes like little lightning darts, it leered at Tom with a wide grin on its mouth, and then it shouted "Ha, ha, ha, yah!" and as it did so the thunder rolled along the ceiling of the room, and Tom thought this was rather an uncomfortable visitor whose laughter caused thunder.

"You don't know me," said the Goblin to Tom, with a malicious glare.

"No, I don't," admitted Tom.

"Well, I'll tell you who I am. I'm the Lightning Fiend! What do you think of that?"

"Oh, I like lightning," said Tom, anxious not to offend the Goblin, "but I'm afraid of thunder."

The Fiend laughed at this, and again the thunder rolled through the room.

"That shows what a silly boy you are. I'm the one to fear. Thunder couldn't hurt you, but if I were to point my finger at you, you would drop dead."

"Oh, dear me!" said Tom, in alarm, "I didn't know that."

Then the Lightning Fiend spread out his hands, and from the ends of its glowing fingers sparks flew in every direction. The Fiend was floating midway between the floor and the ceiling, it reached up its right hand, with the forefinger extended, and touched the ceiling, some plaster fell, and blue smoke curled out from where the finger had rested. Then the Fiend reached down with his right foot until the toes touched the carpet; flame and smoke rose from the spot, and the room was filled with the smell of burning wool.

"Oh, don't do that," cried Tom. "Mother wouldn't like it. She'll be very angry if the carpet is burned."

The Fiend laughed again, and again the thunder rolled overhead.

"Much I care for your mother, or your father either," he said. "I'm not afraid of them, but they're afraid of me."

Tom now realized what a desperate Goblin he had to deal with, who was afraid of neither his father nor his mother.

"I can do a million things your father cannot do," bragged the Fiend, with a malicious leer. "I can go a thousand miles while your father is taking a step."

"I AM THE LIGHTNING FIEND!"

The Fiend saw that, frightened as Tom was, he did not believe this, for Tom knew his father to be the greatest man in all the world, and that nobody could do the things which he could; but he did not dare to contradict a Fiend who was powerful enough to set fire to the house by merely touching it with his toe, and so he was silent. The Fiend seemed to read Tom's thoughts, for he said:

"Oh, I see you don't believe that, so I'll show you what I can do. I'll go ten miles and be back here before you can wink," and, with a shriek, the Fiend shot out of the room. There was an instant's crackle as he left, and in another instant he was back, grinning at Tom.

"There," he said, "I've been ten miles away, I touched a tree, and it blazed up like a powder magazine. Coming back, my foot

rested for the hundredth part of a second on a barn, and now look at it!"

Tom gazed out of the window, and sure enough their neighbour's barn was in flames. He shuddered as he recognised the power the Goblin possessed; nevertheless, he was a brave little boy, and he asked, with some unconscious contempt in his voice —

"Is that all you can do? To go about burning people's things is not very nice, at least, I don't think so."

"Oh, no, that's not all I can do," said the Fiend, again laughing his thundery laugh. "I frighten little boys sometimes; you are as frightened as you can be now."

"Yes, I know I am," said Tom, quaveringly. "But if I were as powerful as you are, I wouldn't go about frightening little boys. Anybody can do that."

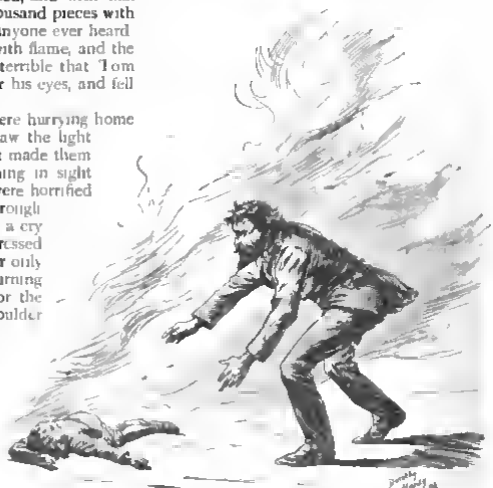
"Oh, ho!" shouted the Fiend, apparently not liking what Tom said. "I haven't shown you yet what fright is; what I have done is nothing to what I can do, and since you dare to talk to me like that, I'll teach you a lesson." He shrieked, and with that the Fiend split into a thousand pieces with the most awful crash that anyone ever heard. The room seemed to fill with flame, and the yell of the Fiend was so terrible that Tom threw up his arm to cover his eyes, and fell fainting to the floor.

His father and mother were hurrying home through the rain. They saw the light of the burning barn, and it made them very anxious; at last, coming in sight of their own cottage, they were horrified to see flames breaking through the roof, the mother gave a cry of despair as they both pressed forward, realizing that their only son was locked up in the burning house. Without waiting for the key, the father put his shoulder to the door and forced it open, for he was a very strong man. The house was filled with smoke and he had great difficulty in making his way to the small parlour, where, by the light of the flames, he saw his little boy lying on the carpet, his head resting on his arm.

The father quickly raised the insensible child in his arms, and carried him from the burning house. There was no shelter for them, and all they could do was to stand in the pouring rain and watch the destruction of their home. It was a terrible thing for the Lightning Fiend to have done, for in the cottage was everything the poor people possessed.

The mother took the boy and rocked him in her arms. The cold rain splashing on his face quickly revived him, and he was soon able to tell his parents what he had seen and what the Fiend had said to him. They looked one at the other, and the mother began to weep. She was afraid their boy had lost his mind, but that turned out not to be the case, for when Tom grew up he became one of the famous men of the day. His name travelled all over the world. He was a great electrician, inventing many useful things, and the man who invents useful articles gathers wealth; so Tom was rich, rejoicing in having money, because he had a boy of his own to whom he could give advantages he had not himself possessed when he was young.

When Tom the second was the same age as Tom the first had been at the time of the



HE SAW HIS LITTLE BOY LYING ON THE CARPET.

Lightning Fiend's visit, his father took him on his knee, and told him the story that I have set down. Young Tom was greatly interested, and watched his father with wide-

open eyes as he told the story of the Lightning Fiend

"Why do you say, father, that you thought you saw the Goblin? Aren't you sure you saw it?"

"I was sure at the time, my boy, but I have thought since that it may have been a dream I had while I was falling to the floor"

Young Tom pondered over this for a while, and at last said —

"I would rather believe, father, that you really saw the Goblin."

"Well, perhaps I did," said the father, thoughtfully; "in fact, I am never quite sure whether I saw it or not, so we will take it for granted that I did, if you like it better"

And so young Tom went up to his room thinking deeply of the Goblin story. He wondered whether or not he would be afraid if a Goblin visited him Young Tom possessed a much finer room than the one in which his father saw the Goblin, for, as I have said, his father was rich, while his grandfather had been very poor, it had been years before his grandfather recovered from the loss caused by the burning of his cottage Tom felt glad that his grandfather was still alive to enjoy the comforts now provided for him.

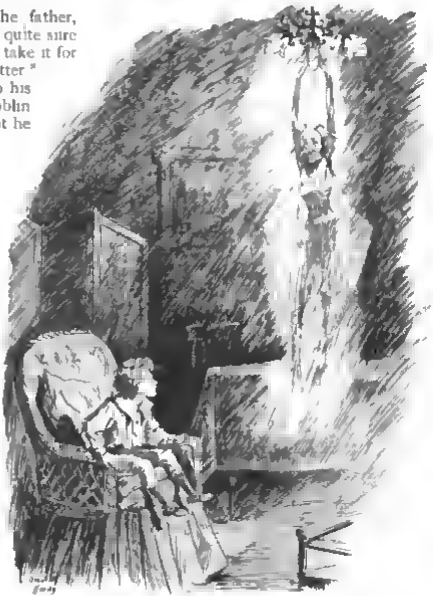
There was an easy-chair in Tom's room, and he seated himself in it and thought over the Goblin story until he felt a little bit frightened, for the room was growing dark He then arose and pressed a button that rang a bell downstairs. In a little time a servant rapped lightly at the door.

"Did you ring, Master Tom?" she asked.

"Yes, Betty; it is getting dark, and father doesn't like me to meddle with the light"

The maid walked to a projection in the wall, and, giving it a slight turn, the chandelier was instantly illuminated, flooding the apartment with light Tom seated himself again before the fire, and the servant went downstairs. All at once Tom noticed the electric lights of the chandelier growing dimmer and dimmer. He was surprised at this; but his surprise increased when, on looking up at the chandelier, he saw hanging from it by the hands a curious object, which glowed in the semi-darkness as if it had been rubbed with phosphorus. Tom at once recognised it as the Lightning Fiend, although he felt sure it was much changed from what it had been when his father had seen it Its long arms were thin and lean, and in its face was a look of fear It seemed afraid to let go of the chandelier, but at last it did so, and fell upon the table It sat up presently, and drew its hand wearily across its brow Seeing that Tom was looking, it drew a deep sigh.

"You are the Lightning Fiend?" said Tom, by way of beginning a conversation



"IT SEEMED AFRAID TO LET GO OF THE CHANDELIER"

"Alas, yes," said the Goblin, again mopping its brow.

"Well, if you think to frighten me," said Tom, "you will find yourself disappointed I know all about you; you are negative and positive, and if you go round a piece of soft iron by means of an insulated copper wire, you make that iron a magnet. You can be produced by a dynamo revolving rapidly; it brings you up out of the ground, and we can also make you by different chemical solutions You see, I know all about

you, and you can't frighten me as you did my father a long time ago. If I were to stand on a sheet of plate glass you couldn't even touch me. You can't frighten him now," said Tom, who had the same confidence in his father that most little boys have in theirs.

"No," said the Fiend, dejectedly, "I don't want to frighten anybody. The frightening of your father was the greatest mistake of my life. I am very sorry I did it; no one can be more sorry."

"I don't wonder at it," said Tom; "for you burnt my grandfather's house, and he was very poor then."

"Oh, I don't know that I mind the burning of the house so much," said the Fiend, with some return of his old jauntiness. "I have burnt lots of houses and will again. It's about the only fun I have left. It is the frightening of your father I regret, not on his account either, because, you see, I'm a selfish brute. It is because he has set me to work that I am sorry. I had nothing at all to do when your father was a boy, but now I am almost worked to death. Even when a little boy like you pressed that button, I had to jump right down to the kitchen and tell the servant you wanted her, and that is not the worst of it."

"Well, what is the worst of it?" asked Tom.

"I have to do heavy work all day. Those street trams that run past your door with a wire above them, I have to pull; I have to run them filled with people from early morning until late at night—until all the people are home from the theatres, and it is very hard work, I tell you; but that isn't the worst of it," he added, as he drew his hand again across his anxious brow.

"Well, what is it?" asked Tom, growing very curious to know what might be the very worst of it.

"Long before the street cars stop I have to light up the whole city, and keep it lighted until daybreak. Think of that! But that isn't the worst of it."

"I shouldn't think that anything could be worse than having to work both night and day," said Tom. "Most people have to work only in the daytime."

"Ah, but there's no rest for me," said the Goblin, sighing. "All night long, as well as all day, I have to carry messages. Any little boy can call me up. I have to plunge under the sea, and carry the news to all parts of the world. People used to be satisfied when a steamer brought the news across the ocean in eight or nine days, but if I am half a second carrying it to any part of the world, they think I am slow. And then I have to look after the signals of all the railways in the world; but that isn't the worst of it."

"Dear me," said Tom, wonderingly, "whatever is it, then?"

"Well, I run motors that drive sewing-machines, fans, and all sorts of machinery, so that with lighting, message-carrying, and all that I have to do, what I fear is that your father will go on inventing more work for me, and that's the worst of it," said the Fiend, sighing heavily.

"Well, you won't have time to frighten any more little boys then," said Tom.

"Oh, don't talk about that any more," said the Fiend, angrily; "I've had enough of it. If I had never frightened your father I would never have had all this work to do, and he perhaps would not be the greatest electrician in the world. Hark!" said the Fiend, after a pause, "that is your father's step. I must go."

He caught hold of the chandelier, swung himself up, and immediately the lights blazed up in the room.

"Well, I'm glad," said Tommy, "to know the worst of it."

"So-ho, my boy, you've been asleep," said his father, as he entered the room, and saw Tom blinking at him.

"Oh, no, father. I was just thinking over that Goblin story, and, very strangely, while I was thinking the Goblin came. He remembered you, and was sorry he had frightened you, so, you see, it was true, and you did see him."

"Really?" said the father, and he smiled at his son's earnestness. "And how did he look: just the same as when I saw him?"

"No, father, he was tired out. He has to work night and day, and he doesn't like it."

"Well, Tom, then this is a secret between you and me; we've both seen the Goblin in the two stages of his existence; and now," stroking Tom's curly head, "when little boys begin to see Goblins, it is time to go to bed."

And so Tom went to bed, and what he dreamed about that night you may easily guess.

ONCE upon a time there was a poor man, who lived somewhere in the middle of the woods near a place called Gâtines de Treigny. Everybody called him Father Rameau. Not that he had any children—he had not even ever been married; nor that he was very old, for he was barely fifty; but he had always had such a hard time of it that his hair had grown grey very early, and his back had been bent and bowed long before its time.

He was generally to be seen toiling along under a big bundle of brooms, which he made with the greatest skill from young birch branches, selling them on market days to the housewives of Saint-Amand or Saint-Sauveur.

Father Rameau was not ambitious, far from it; if he had been alone in the world, without relations depending on him, he would have been quite content to live on black bread every day of the week, with an occasional glass of wine from the charitable folk of the neighbourhood. But Father Rameau had a younger sister married to a vine-dresser of Perreuse, and he was godfather to their daughter, she was just growing up into a woman, and was so pretty and modest and intelligent, that everyone had a good word for her, and now she was engaged to be married to a young man called George, a capital worker, but without a penny in the world. The wedding was to take place as soon as she was twenty; and they had given each other engagement-rings, common leaden rings, bought from one of the pedlars who visit the hamlets of the district.

Humble as he was where he himself only was concerned, Father Rameau was proud indeed in matters connected with his niece.

"A leaden ring," he murmured, "when so many other girls, not half as good as my god-daughter, have a gold one! How I wish Madeleine could choose the one she liked best from the jeweller's shop in Saint-Sauveur. Ah, it's not much use wishing. If I put by every penny I could spare for years and years I could never afford it. Madeleine's poor, George is poor, I am poor, and always shall be. Well, we're honest, that's one comfort, and we needn't be jealous, at any rate."

As the old broomseller was thinking all this, he met George, who was driving a pair

of oxen, their nostrils steaming in the first rays of the morning sun. "Good-day, lad," said he.

"Good-day, Father Rameau."

"Off to work already?"

"Yes, father. I'm just going over the master's fields for the last time before seed sowing; we shall begin next week. We're rather behind-hand, you know."

"So you are; October's nearly over."

"Can you guess what I was thinking of as I came along?"

"*What* you were thinking of? You mean *who*," said Father Rameau, rather crossly.

"Well, yes, you're right. Madeleine is never out of my mind," answered George, thoughtfully. "I was saying to myself that if there are plenty of weeds over there" (and he pointed to the uncultivated moor with his goad), "there is good soil as well, and that anyone who had time to clear even a corner of it might buy the girl he was engaged to——"

"A gold ring!"

"How *did* you guess what I meant? You don't come from Chêneau, where all the wizards live," laughed George.

"No witchcraft in that, nephew. The other day I saw how unhappy you were that you could only give Madeleine a leaden ring, and I was just as sorry myself that I couldn't buy her a better one . . . and ever since I've been trying to think of a way . . ."

"And have you found one, father?"

"*You've* found it for me, lad. I shall make a clearing of a bit of the moor."

Even at the risk of offending his future uncle, the young labourer could not help smiling.

"That's a task for stronger arms than yours, father," he said. "No one can beat you at cutting birch branches and making them into brooms. But that doesn't need so much muscle as digging up soil like this, pulling up the great roots out of it, or smashing and carrying away huge boulders of rock. Ah, if only I had not given my word to stay with my master till I am married!"

"You may laugh at me, lad, but I won't bear malice," said the old man. "If the old are not so strong as the young, they are more persevering. I shall clear a bit of the moor, and with the money from my first harvest, we will go and buy the ring. Good-bye, lad."

"Good-bye, father, we shall see you doing wonders before long, I know."

"I shall be working for Madeleine," he said, "and your patron saint (George means cultivator of the soil) will help me."

At twelve precisely, Father Rameau came back to the moor with a heavy pick on his shoulder, he meant to set to work without delay.

Bang went the first stroke of the pick,

"HE STOOD SUDDENLY STOCK STILL."

accompanied with the significant grunt diggers, woodmen, and such folk give over their work. But just as he was raising his arm for another try, he stood suddenly stock-still, with eyes staring wide in a white, terrified face.

From the midst of the boulders scattered about, which were trembling like Celtic monuments, had arisen an apparition, which the old man knew was supernatural and divine, though its form was human.

Imagine a tiny little lady, ethereal rather than thin, youthfully lovely and dainty, a kind of dream beauty, attired in a silvery tunic, embroidered with gorse blossoms. On her head a wreath of heather; in her hand a wand of the broom plant in blossom; all around the holly, ferns, and junipers, all the wild plants and shrubs, were bowing down as if in homage to a Sovereign. A ray of sunlight was playing round her head like an aureole. She was the Fairy of the Moor.

"You are a bold man," she said to the old workman, "to dare thus to encroach on my domains." There was a thrill of anger in her clear voice, and her blue eyes sparkled.

"Lady Fairy," stammered the old man, "be merciful to a wretched labourer who never meant to wrong you. Your domains are so vast, I hoped there would be no harm if I took the liberty of borrowing just a little corner from you."

"What do you want it for?"

"To cultivate it," answered old Rameau, who was beginning to feel less frightened.

"To cultivate it!" cried the fairy. "You mean to dig it up, turn it over, and upset it all round! Do you not see how lovely it is now, and are you so presumptuous as to think you can do better for it than Nature has done already?" Her voice grew softer as she went on: "What could you find anywhere that is as beautiful as this spot in spring-time, when, under a sky of the tenderest blue, the little leaves are beginning to bud on the branches, the tufts of narcissus are opening among the marshes, and everywhere in the woods around the blackbirds are beginning to whistle their first notes, the doves keep up a gentle cooing, and the jays are chattering like parrots?"

"A couple of partridges calling to each other," answered the old man, "a quail uttering its three sonorous cries, or a lark soaring into the sky with its breathless melody, make a pleasanter sound, to my way of thinking. But these are birds that like to build their nests among the corn. They are not found near your kingdom."

"In summer," went on the fairy, "when the moors are flooded with sunshine, and the heat brings out a delicious odour of resin from my favourite shrubs, I love to look on the purple of the heather, and the gold of gorse and broom."

"I prefer the pink-clover with the drowsy bees humming over it," answered the old man, "and the ripening harvest, yellow like your beautiful hair, Lady Fairy."

Fairy as she was, the queen of the moors was not displeased at the compliment. Father Rameau saw this from her face, and said to himself his cause was half won.

"In autumn," she retorted, though, "even here, there comes to me out of the depths of the thickets near, the baying of the pack when the hunt is out, and often they traverse my domains to get from one part of the forest to another. The poor, hunted stag, whose tongue is hanging out of his mouth with weariness, makes for this very heap of rocks sometimes; then I help him to elude his cruel foes and to get away safely."

"Yes," said the old man, as if he liked this idea, "the dogs get their noses pricked on the thorn bushes and lose trace of their prey. That is indeed a kind action. I, too, like to put the pack on a wrong scent. The stags are such dear things, with their soft brown eyes. Those in this neighbourhood know me, and when I sit down to make my brooms right in the middle of a copse, as I do sometimes, they come quite close up to me. If only there were wheat growing on your moor, you would be able to protect the hares, too, for they would then take refuge in the shelter of your park."

"But when you have pulled up my holly and junipers, and broom-bushes, how shall I be able to make fires for the long winter evenings? I shall die, pierced by the cruel breath of the keen north wind, and be buried under a shroud of white snow."

"Oh, gracious fay, if you fear the cold, will there not always be the place of honour kept for you by our chimney-corner, in the little home I mean to build on the moor? You will come and get warm whenever you like by our fireside. My god-daughter, Madeleine, will keep you company, and some day, perhaps, I shall entreat you to be god-mother to her first baby."

Thus Father Rameau had his answer ready for all her objections. These last words of his touched the fairy, and the expression of her face became very soft and kind. "I know Madeleine well," she said; "I know how fair she is to see, in her snowy white caps. I know how her goodness is spoken of far and wide, and I have even heard that she is to marry that hard-working lad I saw talking with you this morning. They will be a charming pair, and their home will be a delightful place. And you, dear old man,

"FATHER RAMEAU CLEARS THE PATCH"

who have no ambition for yourself, but only care for your dear ones, you will have your reward for your cheerful faith in the future. Take up your pick and have courage over your digging. I grant you this corner of my domain. The rest I am sure you will respect, for you are not greedy; will the others who come after you spare it, too? Alas, when once the moor has been cleared all over and cultivated, I shall have to die! But we will only think of the happiness of your young folk; and, silence! not a word of all this to anyone!"

And with a finger on her lips, she vanished.

By the end of October Father Rameau had dug over, cleared, and prepared two acres of ground. All by himself? With his pick-axe and spade? Yes, quite by his self, and with his pickaxe and spade. He had worked as if by magic, for the fairy, always present and always invisible, had endowed him with some of her magic power. She helped him to split the hardest boulders, to haul up the most tenacious roots, to collect in bundles the old tree-stumps and weeds, and every kind of rubbish, and set fire to it, and so make the very first dressing the soil had ever had on it. Will you believe it? By seed-sowing time the ground was ready, and was sown with oats which began to grow in no time, came well through all the frosts, and by the following April was waving abroad in a luxuriant mass of green. A lark built its nest in it, and every morning nodded its little tufted head at Father Rameau, who was watching over its nest, as if out of gratitude for what he had done.

The harvest was splendid, and fetched a high price.

George could no longer smile at Father Rameau's old arms, and had to confess he had found his master: Father Rameau smiled slily when he said, "After all, nephew, we shall have a gold ring for Madeleine." But when the time came for getting it, Madeleine would not allow it. "No, father," she said, "you have toiled and moiled this year at your digging, buy a plough. anyone will lend you a plough-horse for a few days, and it won't be nearly such hard work for you."

So when autumn came again, the old man cleared another two acres, and next summer his harvest was twice as big—and so were his profits.

Madeleine still refused the precious ring. "Buy a pair of oxen," she said; "you will be independent then of everyone."

Next year the old man's field was bigger than ever, and Madeleine advised him to use the profit of his harvest for building a little house. Her modest, sensible advice was acted upon every time, and, in fact, when the wedding-day arrived, the gold ring

had still not been bought, and at the marriage ceremony, in the church at Treigny, it was over the old leaden rings of their betrothal that the curé pronounced his blessing. "We have given our hearts to each other," said the young wife; "what do we want with gold rings after that? What do you think, George?"

"I mean to spend the money on a cottage, surrounded by a circle of bright light, the marvellous godmother, the Fairy of the Moor.

Many tried to follow Father Rameau's example and cultivate a portion of the moor, but very few succeeded, because the fairy could see into the very bottom of their hearts, and would only help the true-hearted, rare folk, alas, in this world. There is much left

"THE FAIRY OF THE MOOR"

christening robe, then," said Father Rameau, gaily. "Bless me, things'll have to be just so then, if ever they are! If you only knew what kind of a godmother——"

But he stopped short just in time, remembering the fairy's injunction about silence, and Madeleine, whom he had made very inquisitive, could not get another word out of him. She never found out what he meant till her first baby was born, when on the day of the christening, there stepped into the still to be cleared. And she yet lives on, the little fairy of the silvery tune embroidered with gorse blossoms, with her crown of heather bells, and her wand a verdant broom branch. But if ever you want to see her, as old Father Rameau did, you must arrive at the Mid day Rock on the first stroke of twelve, and have a conscience perfectly clear, two conditions which seem easy enough, and which are really very difficult of fulfilment

Le Grand Désastre

By Christie Dutton.

THE "Hôtel des Touristes" was a modest dwelling, a simple *auberge* for travellers, guides, and mules passing on towards "Le Summet." It evidently possessed little accommodation, fewer luxuries; yet its appearance pleased me. The brown châlet, with its green shutters, was situated on a little grassy plateau, half-way down the mountain. After the snow-covered heights above, and the brown, barren rocks we had just passed, the spot had a cooling, restful look about it. A vague idea suggested itself to my mind.

I paused a moment, and looked before me. What a view! Straight in front, the other side of the valley, rose the rocky, grim, cross-crowned head of Flégère, alongside, and towering some thousand mètres above it, was the snowy Brévent. The sun was just sinking, the reflection in the sky threw a crimson stain upon its glistening whiteness. Mont Blanc would have been magnificent, but I could not see it, as it lay in a line parallel to where I stood. In the distance, however, to my right, the Alps du Valais compensated for it; the evening shadows had not yet fallen—there they stood, one pure, glittering chain of icy cones. Never had I seen them more exquisitely clear, more intensely beautiful.

Immediately below, the fir clad lower portion of my own mountain sloped away; here and there the narrow, yellow mule track peeping out, as it corkscrewed downwards. Through the valley I could trace the long white road that curved to Chamounix; even now it looked hot and close; my vague idea grew into a resolution.

"Joséphe," I said, turning to my guide, "I shall rest here the night."

"*Bon Dieu!*" he cried, "not so, monsieur. It is the Anniversary! The day of the 'Grand Désastre!' Three years ago——"

I smiled. "You told me that before. Why should there be another avalanche to-night?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "The mountain is haunted, they say, monsieur; on these nights there is always a fearful storm, and voices——"

"A storm on such a night!" I burst out, laughing.

"But, monsieur, that is the house itself!"

"And what happened there? The avalanche did not touch it?"

"No—no!" he shook his head. "But the people——"

"What had they to do with it?"

Again he shook his head, and a vague expression, either ignorance or obstinacy, overspread his features.

"I will sacrifice ten francs—would monsieur mind if I leave?"

The way down was easy now; I had had enough of the heavy, stupid fellow; I paid him, gave him a *pourboire*, and sent him home.

In answer to my request, the *aubergiste* replied he had a comfortable bed, "Everything was in readiness for monsieur," but his manner was hesitating; he glanced at me in an uneasy, wondering way.

"I know," I smiled, "it is the anniversary night, but we English are not superstitious. Will you have me?"

"*Bien!*" his face brightened; he was an honest, good-looking fellow. "*Mais oui!* Adèle and I will do our best; we shall be delighted to have your company."

I believed him, for he looked nervous and apprehensive.

There were few people in the *café*, and they soon left. I enjoyed my simple supper of chicken, salad, and Gruyère, but the room was close and cheesy; the air outside had now grown chilly. "Have you a private room?" I asked the waiter, the only one the hôtel possessed.

There was a door in the side of the *café*, he opened it, and showed me into a neat little parlour. It was scantily furnished, however, and had rather a cold, cheerless appearance. The deal floor and pinewood table were uncovered; some cheap ornaments adorned a second smaller table in the window, the usual white stove stood in a corner of the room, but, of course, it was unlighted.

One thing, neither cheap nor usual, attracted my attention, hanging in a small glass case beside the stove. It was a beautiful silver châtelaine of rare device—the chains fell from an elaborately chased lover's knot, the bows were set with opals. There were no pictures or other ornaments upon the wall, except a carved cuckoo clock, which ticked lustily away, and two large marble statues of the Virgin, which smiled down from their respective roomy brackets. I did not feel good enough to restrict myself to such society.

"Send the *maître d'hôtel* to me," I called back to the *garçon*.

The *propriétaire* arrived. I had a chat with him. I soon learnt his name was Louis Pétrone, that he had a wife, but no children, that he had formerly been a guide, and that, on the whole, he was a highly entertaining, intellectual man.

"Come and have a pipe with me," I said.

He was apparently delighted, then he hesitated, coughed, and flushed under his dark skin. "May I bring Adèle with me? She's nervous, monsieur, and—it's the anniversary——"

"Certainly," I laughed, "you must tell me the reason of this superstitious dread of yours and why——" He shuddered, and I thought his face looked older as he glanced towards the sky, but I registered a vow I'd have that history. It would do the fellow good to talk about it.

Accordingly, half an hour later, when we three sat in the little room, around the empty stove, Adèle knitting as if for her very life, Louis and I smoking, when we had grown more familiar over a modest taste of wine, after sundry persuasions and commands, I got him to begin

"*Eh bien! Si vous voulez,*" he acquiesced, but I noticed his face was grave, his voice had lost its cheeriness, and Adèle's head bent low; and this is the translation of his history:—

"It was three years ago, this first week in July, when we found the body of poor Henri Pallisier, the Balme guide, beneath 'Les Escaliers du Diable.' Ah! you do not know the place? *Ma foi!* you must have seen it in your descent this morning, but Josèphe may not have told you. Passing 'L'Aiguille Ternfique,' two kilomètres from the summit, climbing down the narrow bed of the 'Glacier du Droisier,' you near it at the point where the stream divides. In former days, before the great avalanche prevented it, the quickest way to get below the belt of ice was by the steps cut from the left glacier stream. It is a sheer precipice, over a mass of pointed rocks rising from, and divided by, narrow, bottomless abysses. They are called 'Les Dents du Chien.' Winding above these, till you reached a spot opposite the shallowest, you made a sharp descent, and passing between the two 'Dents d'Enfant,' after an almost perpendicular climb up again the other side, gained the 'Pas du Midi.' The powdered snow lies lightly on its rocky surface, when you got there your difficulties were at an end, but it was a nasty route, monsieur—a dangerous route," and Louis sighed.

"We found Pallisier's body resting on a ledge of rock at the mouth of one of the largest fissures. He was on his face, and had fallen from a great height; his body was terribly mutilated, but we knew him, as we should have known any guide for fifty miles around, had we seen but a quarter of his features. Pallisier's stock lay by him; strapped round his shoulders was the battered, empty case of an opera glass. Chips of the glass were scattered all about, inside the case we found the curious name of Clulo Godwin.

"Round Henri's waist, strained very tight, was the rope that bound his companion to him. It had broken, the end was hanging over the edge of the chasm; we all knew what that meant! We searched about, though we knew it was useless; then we brought him here. He had no wife or kindred, monsieur, but we did our best for him. He looked quite nice when Adèle had washed and dressed him. We laid him on the bed in our own little *attique*, then I sent down to Chamounix to give intelligence.

"It was the next day, in the evening, before anybody came to see about the body. They could scarcely have had it in the papers then, but about seven o'clock, monsieur, a young lady surprised us by walking into the *café*. She was quite young, only about nineteen, and very slight. She was not tall, either, but she carried herself in a way that made her look like a little queen—not that she was conceited at all, or grandly dressed, she wore one of those white jackets and skirts your English misses wear; a big white hat, and a white lace veil almost hid her face. One thing grand she had on—monsieur, I was forgetting it—it was that silver châtelaine hanging yonder by the stove; the relations gave it to me afterwards." Louis paused a moment, gave a fierce puff or two at his pipe, and then continued:—

"She walked to the centre of the room in silence, and laid a hand on the table, then it was I noticed the hand was shaking, and that a bright, glittering ring on the third finger looked too big and heavy for it.

"'Have you found the body?'—those were her very first words, monsieur, the French was good, but the voice trembled so I scarcely caught her meaning.

"'Pardon?' I looked up. She had flung the thick veil back. Two big blue eyes were scanning each countenance around the room.

"I can't describe a face, monsieur, but this one was the prettiest, smallest one I've ever seen—little fair curls round it, and all pink and white; but as I kept on looking it seemed to me the pink grew very little and the white more, and that white was very white indeed.

"Now, we were rough men in the *auberge* that night, monsieur, but there was not a soul of us that had not stood and doffed his hat; and though we were brave and fearless, yet that long, searching look that scanned us all, made each drop his head in turn. Adèle was the only one who had wits enough to break the silence.

"'Come, mademoiselle,' she said, gently—and Adèle can speak gently if she will, monsieur—'sit down and rest, and tell us all your trouble. We have found the guide's body'—she laid a hand kindly on the English lady's arm, but she shook it off.

"'No! no!' she cried, 'the other—have you not found it?' She had discovered somehow I was the *propriétaire*; her eyes were fixed on me. 'Tell me, quick.'

"I dropped my head; I couldn't look at her, monsieur. I had guessed her secret. The tobacco smoke in the room was strong, it got into my throat. I cursed it, for it sounded in my voice. 'No, mademoiselle,' I replied, 'it is impossible.'

"'Why impossible?'

"'The chasm is bottomless.'

"I expected her to scream, or faint, but she did neither, she did not even stagger

"'Show me the opera-glass case,' she said.

"I went to fetch it.

"'Come into the private room,' I heard Adèle say, as I reappeared, but mademoiselle shook her off again, and though a chair was pushed behind her, she did not seem to see it.

"Before I reached her, she had seen me, however, and the case was in her hand. She walked up to the lamp, and read the soiled label out aloud: 'Clulo Godwin, Clulo—Clu-lo—Clu-lo God win,' again she seemed to spell it out, though her eyes were shut, and the case lay on the table.

"Then suddenly she turned and looked at me again. 'Why is it impossible to find him?' This time her voice was calm, almost cold

"'Because, mademoiselle,' I replied, once more, 'the chasm is bottomless.'

"'Where is it?'

"'Beneath "Les Escaliers du Diable," among "Les Dents du Chien."'

"'How far?' her words came in quick, imperious tones.

"'Two kilomètres from here, mademoiselle.'

"'I will go. Who will be my guide?' She looked round the room inquiringly, but no one spoke.

"'It is late, mademoiselle,' I ventured, 'and cold. The sun has gone behind——'

"'The moon is rising,' she broke in, decisively. 'You say it is cold—you do not think of him—suppose he may be there, crawled out of that hole? He will be faint, wounded——'

"A little mutter ran round the room, several shook their heads, all of them were looking down; she did not notice it.

"'Who will guide me there? I am going, I say.' Again she looked round, but there was silence.

"I saw her lips were tightly pressed together, I noticed an uncomfortable bright light shining in her eyes, though not a shadow of a tear was there. I told her I would go. She didn't speak one word to me, monsieur, though it was an hour's climb or more. On and on she went, like some young chamois, scarcely seeming to touch the ground, while I stumbled on, a mètre or so behind her. And when we stood on the path, almost beside the spot, she would not rest. We had to descend to a little plateau, bordering the very edge of the fissure, opposite the ledge where poor Pallsier was found. She could get no nearer then, poor thing, and there we stood, with the great black chasm opening at our feet, the snow peaks towering above, the great brown boulders surrounding us on every side. The moon was shining with a bluish light on her pale, startled face—it lit up her white, thin figure, till she looked to me like nothing living. I didn't like it, monsieur, and when her voice suddenly rang out, with a clear, unearthly ring, 'Clulo! Clulo! Clulo!' I crossed myself, and trembled like a coward.

"Again and again it was repeated. I tried to drag her back, or make her lean on me, but, no—for nigh an hour there she stood. And then she knelt, and I gripped her skirt as she leant forward on her hands and knees, and called, and called, and called. The rocks reverberated with the wailing cry, occasionally the blackness below sent a faint

"SHE LEANT FORWARD AND CALLED.

echo back; everywhere else an awful, death-like silence reigned.

"Her voice grew hoarse; she rested a little, then began again; now, it was so passionate, so pitiful, I dropped tears she never knew of on her dress. Then the tears, which never came to her own eyes, seemed to get into her throat, and the words came in great gulps, with choking fits between.

"I got her home at last, monsieur, never a word she spoke to me again, but this time her feet in truth scarce touched the ground—I carried her in my strong arms. It was midnight when we reached the châlet. Adèle had the best guest-room ready. After forcing mademoiselle to drink warm milk, she dressed her in the *robe-de-nuit* she had for her own wedding, and laid her in the bed. You sat up with her, was it not so, Adèle?"

Louis broke off abruptly in his narrative, looked up at his wife, and apparently wiped a mosquito from his eyes.

"*Eh! Oui*" Adèle just flashed one glance up from her knitting, though she might have done it blindfold. I noticed her face was working strangely.

"She walked up and down the whole night long. I didn't question her, and she didn't seem to notice me, but her hands were clasped behind her, her eyes were curiously bright, and her lips kept moving, moving ——" The peasant woman was bending over her work again—she relapsed into her former moody silence.

"*Si, si,*" Louis began again. "Well, it was in the morning, quite early, we had another arrival: the father and mother of the mademoiselle. The day before they had returned to their hotel to find the newspaper lying open, and their daughter vanished. They had traced her with difficulty, and, *ma foi!* how nervous and anxious they were, and how they sobbed with joy and grief on their arrival!

"In five minutes they had told us all. There was not much to tell. Clulo Godwin was to have married their daughter—Lil they called her—before the month was out. He had taken leave of them two days before the accident.

"We led them to the bedroom where we had left mademoiselle: the place was empty. We knew where she had gone! I guided them myself, monsieur, and by the 'Escalier du Diable' we found her. They went to meet her; I came back alone.

"Just before dinner they returned. They passed through the *café* to this private room they were to hire. The mademoiselle walked first; she looked neither to the right nor left; her big, blue eyes had a hard, cold stare in them—they seemed to be looking at something in the distance; her face had a lifeless, set look on it. The gentleman and lady followed; the lady had her handkerchief to her eyes. The old man came up to me and laid a shaking hand on my arm.

"'I do not think she knows us, Monsieur Pétrone,' he said, 'but she obeys us like a child.'

"They stayed two weeks with me, these English. Every day, first thing in the morning, mademoiselle glided silently away, the mother or the father followed at a distance. She hardly ever spoke to them. She ate, undressed, lay down, but never slept; rose, and dressed again, like some wax-work machine, and every day the pink colour on her face grew less, till at last her lips themselves looked almost white.

"'Do you think it is any use our staying here?' the monsieur asked of me one morning; 'if any tidings turned up, you would be the first to hear them——?' I shrugged my shoulders and shook my head.

"'No use, monsieur, for that; but the mademoiselle?'

"Ah! *pauvre homme!* how he groaned.

"'We will stay the fortnight out,' he said, 'and then, God help us!'

"It was the afternoon, the day before their departure, that a strange thing happened. A mule arrived from Chamounix, carrying a tall Englishman, broad, and well made, with a handsome face, but sallow, sunken cheeks. His clothes were torn and dirty; he alighted with difficulty, limped into the *café*, and asked, in *affreuse français*, for Monsieur and Madame Beaumont. It was Clulo Godwin! I don't care to be in the way, monsieur; scenes make me nervous and uncomfortable. I left them together in the *café*, and went to clean my knives with Jean. I had heard how it all happened, that was enough for me.

"The young fellow fell first, on a ledge higher up than that on which we found poor Pallisier—it was then the rope snapped and sent Henri to his death. The Englishman must have fainted, for when he realized where he was, and saw the guide's mangled body down below, it was almost dark. He sufferod terrible pain in his ankle, and though he thought no bones were broken, he could only crawl along on hands and knees. He had never been to this hôtel, the nearest shelter he knew of was Pallisier's châlet, four kilomètres away, the western side of the mountain. It was moonlight, but it took

him till eleven o'clock next morning to reach it. Of course, the place was empty, but he had a roof to cover him, and provisions to his hand. He needed both. His journey, the pain and long exposure, brought on a fearful fever. Three days he must have lain unconscious; then slowly he came round again.

"To move was an impossibility, his sufferings were awful, and as his body grew better, the worry in his mind grew worse. How were his friends to know he was alive? The *bon Dieu* favoured him, monsieur; after more weary days, peasants arrived to take away poor Henri's belongings, and there they found the Englishman. They took him to Chamounix; he arrived there only to find his friends had left it! He heard they were here, got a doctor to see to his foot, and then came up immediately.

"THE YOUNG LADY FLUNG OPEN THE DOOR."

"'How is Lil?' was his first question, and he had repeated it five times before I left the room.

"*Eh bien*, monsieur, ah! what came next? How dark it seems to have grown! *Bon Dieu!* there are clouds gathering!" The *aubergiste* turned his weather beaten face towards the window, there was an uneasy light in his eyes; he shivered before he turned round again, though it was as close as possible.

"*Eh bien bon!*' I had cleaned the knives, when I saw them all three pass the cuisine door, on their way to the little plaisance behind; then I heard a light step coming down the stairs, and guessed the reason. Mademoiselle was passing through the *café* to the private room. A moment later Monsieur Godwin repassed—he was going to join her there alone. I waited till I heard the door close on them, then I went into the *café* to see to things a bit. The walls are not thick, as you perceive, monsieur—I heard mutterings—pardon me, I listened. There was only one voice speaking, it was the Englishman's, for half an hour it hardly ever ceased. *Bon Dieu, ne me reproche tu pas!* It was dishonest, but I had great affection towards them—I put my ear to the keyhole, and I heard great sobs, not loud, but long and deep, and half smothered, and then the voice, the man's voice still, began again, now broken and hollow, now clear and quivering like a woman's. 'Lil, Lil, my little Lil! Won't you look? Don't you know? Can't you remember? Our wedding day. My Lilly, look—Clulo——'

"A loud, shrill laugh startled me. I jumped into the centre of the room, not a moment too soon. The young lady flung open the door, and passed close beside me. She did not see me, though her dress brushed my coat. Her eyes were staring, as usual, straight before her. I shuddered as I looked, monsieur—the light in them appeared to me more unearthly, more terrible than ever, and her lips showed the little, white teeth as they parted in a ghastly, senseless smile.

"She went out the front way. I knew where she was going. The man followed her. I did not see his face, it was bent so low, I only saw its colour, and it was like a sheet of notepaper. One moment he went *en arrière* to speak to monsieur and madame, then he took his two sticks, and with his head still bent down, went after her.

"It was late that night when they came back. She came in first, as before, he after

her, and each one looked the very same as when they went.'

"'She does not know him, nor ever will,' I told Adèle." Louis was puffing furiously at his pipe, his wife still bent over her work, apparently utterly absorbed, only occasionally I saw her chest heave, and the needles twitch in her hard, wrinkled hands.

"Two days this state of things went on. 'She is mad, and it is killing him,' I told Adèle again. She is not a woman of words, is Adèle, she did not answer, but instead she went and knelt below the crucifix. It was long before I slept that night. I lay watching her lips moving, trying to pray, too. When I woke, she was there still.

"I shall never forget that morning." Louis was looking apprehensively towards the window; he shuddered, and again that curious, half-frightened expression crept over his features.

"'I have an idea in my head,' Adèle came to me and said; 'the *bon Dieu* put it there.'

"Two hours later I told it to Monsieur Godwin.

"'Your lady is mad,' I said. He looked at me, his eyes dropped, he bit his lips, but he did not contradict me, only I saw his fingers twitch, and clasp, and unclasp his stick.

"'She thinks your body lies in yonder fissure. She thought at first you might crawl out alive, and she would find you there—perhaps she thinks so still. There is a ledge on the other side of the chasm, beneath "Les Escaliers du Diable," it is opposite to where she stands. We could get you there——' A flash like lightning came into his eyes.

"'I see,' he cried, in English. 'God bless you!' He wrung my hands. 'She shall find me there to-night! A thousand heartfelt thanks——'

"I had never finished, but he understood me. 'Thank Adèle,' I said, and turned away.

"In one thing the Englishman was obstinate; he must go to 'Les Dents du Chien' by himself, he said. It was impossible, I told him, he could not clamber down alone. At length he consented to let Monsieur Beaumont accompany him and help to place him. Madame was to follow with the young lady."

Again Louis paused—he was looking at Adèle—he seemed at a loss how to proceed. At last he did a strange thing—he moved his chair round, turned his back upon his wife, and then continued. I noticed a change in his demeanour—his words were not so fluent, his sentences came forth in laconic, laboured jerks—his eyes were fixed on the open window and the sky beyond it.

"I see them now," he said, "it was ten o'clock when it happened—they had been gone two hours, it must have been about eight when they set out. I say it again, monsieur, I see them now. Monsieur Godwin, walking better than I had ever seen him, his handsome head held high, a new expression on his face. He turned back as he reached the door, and wrung me by the hand again.

"'God bless you,' he said, once more, 'and your wife Adèle. I believe my love will come to me,' those were his very words, monsieur. And then the old father, with his bent shoulders and white hair, tottering after him. Half an hour later, mademoiselle glided out. She had the same white dress on I had ever seen her in, her face was like a marble Madonna's; but, *ma foi!* it was better than that smile! The mother, who had turned quite grey in those few days, crept out last of all——"

Louis' voice shook, beads of perspiration were forming on his forehead, one ran down his rugged cheek—or was it something else? "*Bon Dieu!*" he muttered, and it was no mere expression, but a prayer.

"It was a night like this—this sultry stillness—this heavy, oppressive silence. This seems to have come on suddenly, that had been on all day. Adèle and I were in the plaisance. We had been there since they left—looking—watching. We could hear the mosquitoes buzzing, zizzing, the tinkle of the cow-bells on the lower bends of the mountain, even, we fancied, the tolling convent-bell five kilomètres below. Suddenly there was a shriek, a scream, then—Adèle and I could swear it—then down the mountain above us came a startled cry a woman's cry—'Clu-lo!' Clu-lo!' We knew the voice. We had heard the cry before, but we had never heard that strange new ring in it—we could swear it, could we not, Adèle?"

And Adèle, though her husband did not see her, nodded, and at last put down her knitting.

"Five minutes later, we were startled by a terrific crash above us. It was something like thunder, only the roar was more rattling and continuous. It grew nearer and nearer, louder and louder—the air vibrated all around the plaisance—the very mountain itself began to shake. We heard them scream inside the châlet. Adèle and I

clasped ourselves in each other's arms—we knew what it meant.

"There we stood for half an hour, then the vibration ceased, the thunder grew distant, and indistinct, the atmosphere became clearer—the avalanche had passed!" Louis mopped his face with his handkerchief, and opened his coat. "It was the Grand Désastre, monsieur, the bursting of the Glacier de Col.

"We found them in the morning, monsieur—they were together. She had her arms round him, his head was resting on her face. Only a few huge rocks had rolled towards 'Les Dents du Chien,' but one was on them—they were on the ledge, their meeting place. We never found the parents; the sea of rocks and ice and snow had swallowed up the path, and all beyond it. But beneath 'Les Escaliers du Diable' there is a stone 'Clulo and Lil' is carved on it—that is all—and underneath, '*Requescant in pace.*' The bodies——" Louis ceased. He puffed at his pipe, but it had gone out.

"*Bon Dieu!*" he cried again. A cloud had suddenly blown up and obscured the face of the moon. We were thrown in almost total darkness, through the open window came the chilling breath of an approaching storm.

A second later a peal of thunder burst right over the châlet, and then, with a wild shriek, the wind arose and dashed a sheet of rattling rain against the panes and roof.

Louis started up, his face looked ashy in the gloom. "Did you not hear it, wife?" He stumbled like a stricken man across the room, but ere he reached Adèle, she had fainted.

All at once, a fork of lightning flashed past me, and played a ghastly dance upon the silver chatelaine. A shivering ague seized even my strong limbs. I dropped my pipe—it crashed upon the floor. Then it was that terrifying shriek arose again, "Clu lo!—Clu lo!" I could have sworn it cried, and as another blast of rain was hurled against the window panes, the clock struck ten,

[Dr. Conan Doyle's new Serial, "The Tragedy of the 'Korosko,'" will begin in the May Number. It relates, in a most striking and thrilling manner, the adventures of a party of English and American tourists on the Nile, who fall among the Dervishes, and will make the reader realize, perhaps for the first time, what a Dervish really is.]

THE TEN LITTLE FAIRIES.

From the French of Georges Mitchell.

A Story for Children.

VAINLY I try to recall from my recollections of yesterday, still vividly remembered, and from those of the long passed, grown tenderly dim in the mists of intervening time, from whom I learned the powerfully moral story I am here going to repeat to children great and small, to men and their companions · I cannot determine from whom it was I learned it.

Did I first read it in some old book laden with the dust of ages? Was it told to me by my mother, by my nurse, one evening when I would not go to sleep—or one night when, sleeping soundly, a fairy came and sang it to me in my slumber? I cannot tell I cannot remember. I have forgotten all the details, of which there only remains with me the subtle perfume—too fine and evanescent for me to seize it in its passage through my mind.

But I retain perfectly retain —the moral, which is the daughter of all things healthy and strong

The things which I am going to recount happened in a charming country — one of those bright lands which we see only in delightful dreams, where the men are all good and the women all as amiable as they are beautiful.

In that happy country there lived a great nobleman who, left a widower early in life, had an only daughter whom he loved more than anything in the whole world.

Rosebelle was seventeen years old—a pure marvel of grace and beauty, gay as a joyous heart, good as a happy one. For ten leagues round she was known to be the most beautiful and best. She was simple and gentle, and her exquisite ingenuousness caused her everywhere—in the mansion and the cottage—to be beloved

Her father, fearful lest the least of the distresses of our poor existence should overtake her, watched over her with jealous care, so that no harm should come to her; while

she passed her days in calmly thinking of the time before her, sure that it would not be other than delightful.

When she was eighteen, her father consented to her being betrothed to the son of a Prince—to Greatheart, a handsome youth, who had been carefully reared, and detested the false excitements and factitious pleasures of cities, loving enthusiastically the fresh charms of Nature—of the common mother who claims us all, the Earth.

Rosebelle loved her *fiancé*—married and adored him.

With him she went to live in the admirable calm of the country—in the midst of great trees that gave back the plaint of winds, by a river with its ever-flowing song, winding under willowy banks, and overshadowed by tall poplars.

She lived in a very old, old castle, where the sires of her husband had been born—a great castle reached by roads hewn out of the solid rock; a great castle with immense, cold halls, where echo answered echo mysteriously, where the night-owl dreamily replied to the early thrush's song to the rising sun, and the other awakened birds singing and chirping on the borders of the deep woods, where the sun enters timidly—almost with the hesitation of a trespasser.

When the time for parting came, her father had said to her, through his tears:—

"You are going from me—your happiness claims that I should let you go—go, therefore, but take all care of yourself for love of me, who have only you in the world to love."

To his son-in-law he said:—

"Watch over her—I intrust her to you. Surround her with a thousand safeguards, screen her from the least chance of harm or pain. Remember that even in stooping to pluck a flower she may fall and wound herself—that in gathering a fruit she may tear her hand. See that all is done for her that can be done—keep her for me ever beautiful."

Absorbed in her love for her husband, Rosebelle realized the sweet dreams of her young girlhood. Then she dreamed—languorously—Heaven knows what! The delightful future which she had seen in the visions of the past was still present with her, however.

Her husband, tender and good, wished that she should do nothing but live and love. He had surrounded her with numerous servants, all ready to obey the least of her desires, the slightest of her fancies, to comprehend the most trivial of her wants. She had nothing to do but to let time glide slowly by her.

At length she wearied—languished mysteriously.

Her father, to whom she communicated this strange experience, was astounded. He reminded her of all the sources of happiness which ought to have existed in her case. He took her in his arms and said all he could think of in laudation of the husband who so greatly loved her; gave her innumerable reasons why her happiness ought to have been unparalleled; offered money—more money—wishful to give all the felicities in the world.

She wished for nothing of all that, it only tired, enervated her.

He besought her to be happy; she replied:—

"I wish I could be so, for your sake and for that of my husband, whom I love so dearly."

And she struggled against the strange evil which so weighed upon her, against the deadly *ennui* that was sapping her young life. But the mysterious ill which tormented her soul grew and grew until it became overwhelming.

Greatheart speedily detected her distress, and sought to discover its cause, but ineffectually; and from alarm he passed into despair.

Now, when he returned from the plain, the fields, or the camp, when he embraced her he pressed against his bosom a bosom cold and filled with sadness and tears—a bosom so cold that it might have been thought to contain a block of ice in place of a heart—and he redoubled his tenderness towards her. Seeing how much he was suffering on her account, she vowed for him a boundless love.

Courageous, energetic even, she tried to shake off the languor which possessed her—endeavouring to intoxicate her soul and drown her self-consciousness in the love of her adored husband; but all her efforts were made in vain, she became more and more oppressed with weariness, and the crowd of servants about her, all eager to realize her wishes, were utterly unable to mitigate her condition by anything they could do.

At last, she fell into a state of the deepest melancholy. The rose-tints faded from her cheeks, her beauty paled like that of a languishing flower, the light in her eyes grew each day more dim. She was very ill.

The most learned doctors in the healing art were called to her, brought, regardless of cost, from the most distant countries—only

to confess their complete inability; excusing themselves by affirming that there was no remedy for an indefinable ailment — an ailment impalpable, incomprehensible.

Then, one day, an old, white-haired shepherd, with a long, snowy beard, who had learned to understand men from having always lived alone with his sheep and thinking, thinking, while he led them to their pasture—an old philosopher—came to Great heart, of whom he was one of the vassals, and said to him:—

"I know where there lives, close by here, an old grand-dame, with one foot in the grave, she is so old. People call her a sorceress, but never mind that; she, and she alone, can cure our lady, our mistress, whom you love so well."

Knowing not what to do in his suffering, Greatheart believed what the old shepherd told him.

He took Rosebelle far away from the castle along the bank of the river, to a spot where the path ran between high rocks, leading to a deep and profoundly dark cavity, within which they found the old, old woman of whom the shepherd had spoken, crouching by the side of a scanty fire of pine-branches, warming herself in their fitful light, in the midst of owls and ravens, cats and rats with phosphorescent eyes, showing green in the obscurity when lit by the intermittent sparkle of the crackling branches on the hearth.

"Ho, there! sorceress!" cried the young Prince. "Cure my wife, and I will give you the half of all I possess!"

"SHE VOWED FOR HIM A BOUNDLESS LOVE."

The very old woman looked for a long time at Rosebelle out of her little, bright eyes, meeting those of the young Princess, and holding her, as if by a spell. For awhile longer she remained silent, as if in contemplation; then, suddenly, she rose to her feet, raised her long arms towards the herbs suspended from the rocky roof of her dwelling-place, spread out her fleshless fingers and cried:—

"I see! I see! I understand it all! Yes, my lord, I will cure your wife—your adored one; and presently in your arms, on your heart, shall sleep a heart beating with great joy for love of you!"

As they both sprang nearer to her, the better to hear her wonderful words, the old woman retreated, saying:—

"Yes, I will cure her; but, to aid me in the task, I need the assistance of ten little fairies—ten friends who have ever been dear to me, ever faithful to me, and who, by an unfortunate chance, have not visited me to-day. To-morrow I shall be sure to have them with me, my tiny comrades; so come back to me to-morrow, my dear, when I will detain them until you arrive, and will take measures for enabling them to cure you."

The sun, next day, had hardly risen, hardly caressed the earth with its earliest beam, when Rosebelle re-entered the old sorceress's murky dwelling-place.

Over the still crackling fire of pine-branches she extended her white hands by direction of the old woman, who raised her arms and

"THE SORCERESS."

uttered some curious words, accompanied by some strange gestures.

Then, from a small cavity in the rocky wall she appeared to draw forth an invisible something, which she carefully conveyed to the shelter of her bare bosom. And when she had repeated these actions ten times, she cried —

"I have them!—I have them all!—all warm in my bosom—my faithful little fairies! Oh!—do not attempt to see them, or they will at once fly away. They desire to serve you—to cure you. Here they are!"

And laughing, dancing, and singing, the old, old woman tapped with the crooked thumb of her right hand the young Princess's ten extended fingers, while the quaint song she sang was gaily given back by the echo of the rocky vault above her. This was the song she sang, holding the Princess's delicate fingers caressingly in her left hand —

Ten good little fairies live,
To these ten good fingers nigh:
Each of you reside in one
Until your kindly task is done,
Until by certain signs yet'll be sure
That you have made a perfect cure
Potent fairies, from this hour
Exercise your utmost pow'r,
Drive away the evil spell
Cast on one who'll love you well!

Then, still laughing heartily, she pressed Rosebelle's fingers tightly, and went on. —

"They are all here, the wonderful little doctors! Guard them preciously, do not weary them, keep them by you, and, to do all that, never give them a moment's rest so long as the sun shines in the sky. Keep on moving them—actively, rapidly—so long as you are awake. Now go, and come back to me when you are quite cured, returning me my trusty little fairies."

With her hands filled with this precious load, Rosebelle hurried home, and told Great-heart of her dear hope of a renewal of life.

Of an evening, thenceforth for a long time, she would even refrain from eating, so as to leave herself more time to exercise her unresting fingers, in which the ten little fairies were tenderly housed. As soon as the sun had sunk beneath the earth she went to sleep, and as soon as daylight returned, she at once rose and began once again to move her fairy-laden fingers.

During many, many days, she continued to move her fingers in every way she could devise, but at length, growing tired of this useless play, she went back to her old friend the sorceress.

"Nobody ever taught you to use your fingers usefully?" replied the old woman. "Go on moving them, still moving them, but in some employment that interests you. Don't let my fairies go to sleep—that is all they desire in their imprisonment."

On returning home, Rosebelle drew her

long neglected harp from its case and played on it. Then, to occupy her fingers more usefully, she had needles brought to her and employed them in dainty sewing.

But, growing weary of the dull monotony of these labours, she sought more varied employment for her fingers—gathered flowers in the garden and arranged them in charming bouquets, plucked fruit from the trees in the orchard; attended to the sick and ailing, consoled the poor—exercising her fingers constantly by slipping gold pieces into their grateful hands.

One by one, she sent away her crowd of obsequious servants, who had now nothing left for them to do but to go to sleep at their posts.

She would not allow anybody to do anything for her which she could do for herself, but threw her whole soul and being into the things God intended to be done by them.

Every day, and all the while the sun shone in the sky, she found active employment for her beautiful fingers. And the roses came back to her cheeks and health to all her being, and songs and laughter to her lips—and she could, once again, give to her beloved one a heart filled with ineffable tenderness.

Perfectly cured, she went to the sorceress and gave her back her wonderful little fairy doctors.

"Ah, my child!" said the old dame, "they are very proud of having saved you. Give them to me, for I have every day great need of them—can never have too much of them. Indeed, if I had enough of them to serve all the idlers in the world, I should want as many as there are stars in the heavens at night. But I will keep those I have for the service of those who are pining from *ennui*—and there are enough of *them*, goodness knows!"

By J. Laurence Hornibrook

IT began to rain early that evening, I remember not a feeble drizzle, either, but a driving, splashing downpour that smote upon the flags with a hissing sound, and gurgled down the gutters in turbid streams. By rare good luck I had got through my full round of professional visits just in time, the first heavy drops were dashed in my face as I sprang from my Rabb car and made for the door. Fortunately I had no very grave cases on hand that day, and looked forward with the keen anticipation gendered by fatigue to the luxury of slippers, a dressing gown, the latest number of the *Lancet*, and a comfortable arm-chair by the study fire. Of course, there was an off-chance of my being routed out again at any moment, for a doctor in one of these wretched little country towns, whose practice dips eight or ten miles into the surrounding country, may consider himself lucky if, on an average, he gets four undisturbed nights out of the seven, and doubly lucky if those nights upon which he is called out do not prove the very worst in the whole week.

Somehow, when I had settled down to my paper, I found it impossible to give myself up to a thorough appreciation of its contents. From the very first I had a sort of intuitive feeling that an urgent case would crop up, perhaps far out in the country. Once or twice I got up, walked over to the window, and drew aside the blind. What a night!—black, wet, the wind howling, and great sheets of water collecting in the deserted street. With a cold shiver, which involuntarily seized upon me, I went back to my arm-chair by the fire.

I think it was getting well on for midnight, when, in one of the fitful lulls of the storm, a sound reached my ears which caused me to lay aside my paper, and sit up in expectation. It was the steady, lumbering trot of a farm horse. Long experience enabled me to recognise it at once. A few yards from my door the trot changed into a slow, heavy walk; then there was an impatient "Whoa!" a clatter of hobnailed boots on the flags, a jerk of the bell-handle, and a peal loud enough to have wakened me if I had been fast asleep in the most distant part of the house.

I went to the door myself, for the house was locked up and the servants had gone to bed an hour ago. The instant I opened it, in came the wind and rain with a rush and a roar, as if bent upon giving me a sample of

what I might expect should I dare to venture out on such a night. So fierce was the gust, it made me gasp for breath as it swept in along the hall, rattling the pictures on the walls, and eddying round the lamp until I expected every moment to find myself in total darkness. I peered out into the wet, and discerned a slouching figure, with a sack wrapped around the shoulders as a protection from the storm, a miller's hat jammed upon the head and tied down over the ears with a piece of string.

"Roydon Mills," came a voice from beneath the hat; "you're wanted!"

YOU'RE WANTED!"

With that, the hobnails clinked upon the flags again, and the messenger straightway retreated towards the spot where the horse stood, steaming and blowing with his head between his forelegs

"Hi! Here!—wait a moment, will you?" I called out after him. "What's wrong at the Mills eh?"

The fellow already had one foot in the stirrup, and barely condescended to turn his head as he flung back over his shoulder the two words, "Child sick!" Without further parley, he swung himself into the saddle, hammered the horse's sides with his heels, and jogged off into the darkness.

Roydon Mills?—five good miles, if it was one! I shut the door, and stood there in the hall, weighing the matter carefully. As I listened to the splashing of the rain outside, a vision of the bleak, storm swept road rose before me, and I confess I shuddered at the prospect On the one hand, there was the certainty of a drenching—for at that time I had not attained to the luxury of a brougham, and must perforce perform the journey in an open vehicle—and the almost equal certainty of a heavy cold resulting therefrom. On the other, duty, of course, ranked first, and—well, if the truth must be told, the inducement of a substantial fee next. I called to mind, too, with what intense anxiety Miller Hopgood and his wife must await my coming, for the homely couple were simply wrapped up in that little boy of theirs — an only child, as it happened. The upshot of it was, though I was not without doubts as to the urgency of the case, I felt there was nothing for it but to face the storm

As ill luck would have it, my groom was laid up, so I had to turn to and harness the mare myself. I don't know whether she objected to a night journey in such weather, but certainly she was so restless and fidgety that I thought I would never get her between the shafts. Once out into the storm, I set my teeth hard, and let her go We tore along at a spanking pace through the wind and rain, and in little less than half an hour I saw the light from the mill-house twinkling through the wet, like a great shining eye watching for my coming No sooner had the wheels crunched upon the gravel than the door was thrown open, and there stood the miller himself, with his head thrust out into the storm

"That you, doctor?" he cried

"Yes"

"Thank God!"

I was scarcely given time to get rid of my

dripping cloak before being hurried off upstairs. Of course I might have known how it would be! In spite of all this fuss and hurry, there was nothing really wrong with the child—a feverish cold, that was all. The little fellow lay in his mother's arms, flushed and fretful, wailing out the childish complaints which had so distressed his parents. I did not keep them long in suspense, and the look of relief which stole into those drawn, anxious faces compensated me to some extent for my midnight journey.

I have been led to dwell upon these details—homely and trivial as they may seem—because, in looking back upon that night, they stand out in sharp and striking contrast to the strange events which happened on the way home. Though more than two years have elapsed since then, I can recall every incident as if it occurred only yesterday. Even now, if the wind rises suddenly in the night, and the rain begins to dash against the windows, I start out of sleep with the horror of those scenes fresh upon me.

I was driving back to Ulverton at two o'clock in the morning, wet, cold, and in anything but an amiable mood. The wind had gone down a little, and the clouds had broken up into dark, irregular patches, that swept across the stormy sky as if speeding to some unknown destination in the far East. The rain still continued to beat in my face and patter upon the oilskin rug across my knees. Wherever I happened to raise my head, I was chilled by the dreary aspect on every side: not a living creature was in sight, even the few stray cattle in the fields were stuck away under shelter of the hedges.

I had reached a spot where the road dipped down into a rocky glen, known as "Pedlar's Hollow," from a tradition that a pedlar had been murdered there in bygone years and robbed of his pack. At the opposite side of the glen there was a pretty stiff ascent, which I knew from experience had to be taken easily.

I had just pulled in the mare at the foot of this incline, when, upon lifting my head, I thought I saw a dark blotch on the white face of the hill. The next instant it seemed to merge into the surrounding gloom. Fixing my eyes steadily upon a point just beyond it, the object, whatever it was, took a more distinct shape, and I became convinced it was moving rapidly towards me. I am not given to be superstitious—we medical men generally lean more to the material than to the spiritual—but really, on the present occasion, I felt a cold thrill creeping up my spine, for my thoughts involuntarily turned to the defunct pedlar, and the possibility of his restless spirit having returned to visit the scene of his tragic fate.

My apprehensions on this point, however, were speedily set at rest. As the figure loomed out of the darkness, I saw that not only was it a creature of flesh and blood, but a very substantial one, too—a tall, powerfully-built man, as far as I could make out. But who could it be?—and what on earth brought him out on this lonely country road at such an hour, on such a night? As I asked myself these questions, an idea suddenly occurred to me, scarcely less startling than the first. Could it be possible there was any truth in the strange rumours current among the country people, and that this was the "mysterious stranger," of whom I had heard so much of late?

How these rumours had originated I had never troubled to inquire, for at the time I regarded them as mere idle gossip. They were to the effect that a man—a gentleman, from all accounts—was in the habit of roaming about these roads at all hours of the night, and in all kinds of weather. The strange part of it was, no one ever remembered having seen him in the daytime, but of his nocturnal wanderings there appeared to be abundant evidence. Belated farmers, returning home from distant markets, had frequently encountered him upon the high road; the inmates of wayside cottages had grown accustomed to hearing his heavy footsteps in the dead of night; a drowsy carrier, stretched on the top of his load, had more than once been startled by his approach, and watched him go striding past with a feeling of superstitious awe. Some asserted that he occasionally muttered to himself as he went on his way; others declared they had heard him cry out, as if in sudden pain.

While all this was passing through my mind, the stranger had rapidly approached, until the light from my lamps began to play upon his tall figure. Suddenly he stopped short, and drew aside towards the hedge, shading his face with his hand, as if the glare dazzled or hurt his eyes. I looked at him in surprise and wonder. What struck me most in his appearance, I remember, was the fact that he was dressed in an ordinary shooting suit—Norfolk jacket, knickerbockers, and peaked cap—without coat, cloak, or covering of any sort, to protect him from the tempestuous weather. He was evidently drenched through and through by this time,

for judging by the way he was splashed with mud he must have been on the road for hours. Just as my wheels were on a line with him, he faced round slowly, and glanced up at me from under his hand.

"Pardon me," he said, politely, "can you

HE GLANCED UP AT ME.

tell me if I am on the right road for Ulverton?"

"You certainly are," I replied—somewhat testily, I am afraid—"but if you wish to reach Ulverton to-night, I would recommend you to turn round and face that hill."

"I am going in the wrong direction, then?"

"Exactly."

He looked at me steadily for a second or two, glanced back doubtfully over his shoulder, and then let his gaze wander on ahead, as if half disposed to question my statement. Presently his eyes came round to me again. I felt rather ashamed at having been so abrupt, and said—

"I am driving into Ulverton myself; if you care to take a seat, it will save you a disagreeable walk."

He thanked me in an abstracted sort of way, came round behind the trap, and was some little time groping for the step. When he got his foot upon it at last, I could hear the shafts and springs creaking as they bent under his weight. He dropped into the seat at my side, lowered his head, and folded his arms across his massive chest.

Not a word was spoken as we climbed the hill. The stranger sat there, gazing fixedly out into the darkness ahead, apparently buried in his own gloomy thoughts, regardless of the driving rain, and seemingly as unconscious of my presence as if I had been miles away. Once or twice I was on the point of making some casual observation, but somehow, when I glanced round at that silent, motionless figure, the words died upon my lips. I felt an awkwardness, a constraint—a shrinking into myself, if I may so describe it—that made me half regret having taken him up. Once, when the wheel passed over a stone, my arm jogged against his, and instinctively I drew away from him as far as possible. I noticed that at times he suddenly pressed his hands over his eyes, and felt the seat tremble under us as if a spasm had shot through his frame.

Not until we had got over the hill, and were rattling along the level road, did my companion venture upon a remark of any kind. Then he seemed to rouse himself from his abstraction, and turning his head towards me, said:—

"Might I ask if you live in Ulverton?"

"I do."

Though I did not pretend to notice it, I could see he was looking at me very earnestly, as if wondering who and what I was.

"You are out late to-night," he remarked, after a pause.

"That is nothing unusual with me, unfortunately. We medical men——"

Scarcely were the words out of my mouth than he started up, leaned forward in his

seat, and clutched the reins. The mare, feeling the tug, stopped short.

"A doctor?" he cried, eagerly. "Do I understand you to say you are a doctor?"

I replied that I was.

"What an extraordinary coincidence!" he exclaimed, with surprising animation. "Would you believe that my sole object in starting for Ulverton to-night was to search for a medical man?"

"Indeed!"

"Will you come back with me to the house?" he urged. "It is not more than a mile from the cross-roads we passed just now. You will render me a great service, I assure you."

"Is it a serious case?" I asked.

"Yes—very serious."

"Might I ask of what nature?"

He was just about to reply, when, without the slightest warning, he suddenly fell back in the seat, and clapped his hands to his eyes. A groan, such as could only have been wrung from him by excruciating pain, broke from his lips. He rocked himself to and fro in the intensity of his suffering.

"What is the matter?" I cried, in surprise and alarm.

"Drive back to the house," he moaned. "For God's sake, don't delay! Take the turning to the left when you reach the cross-roads, and keep straight on."

I wheeled round immediately, and, as I did so, he lurched forward, letting his head fall upon his hands. He remained in this position, never once raising his head, until we had branched off from the main road, and had covered the best part of the distance to the house. Then, as if the paroxysm which had seized upon him had passed, he drew a hard breath, and raised himself slowly. He looked about him in a confused sort of way, like a man just awakened out of sleep, not yet fully conscious of his surroundings.

Right in front of us the road was lined on either side with a row of immensely tall trees; and the branches, meeting overhead, formed a long, dark tunnel, through which the wind moaned dismally. As we drove into it, there was a fluttering and cawing in the topmost boughs as a flock of rooks, disturbed by the light, took wing, circling round and round until we had passed. Every gust of wind sent a shower of huge drops down upon us from the trees.

Presently we came to one of those immense, old fashioned gateways—with massive pillars, surmounted by stone figures, on either side—which impress one with their gloomy yet imposing grandeur. I drew up before it, and glanced inquiringly at my companion.

"Ah! here we are at last!" he said. "Rather a dismal looking place on a night like this. Might I trouble you to open the gates?"

We drove up a long avenue, shaded with trees, and, sweeping round a bend, came in sight of the house. So far as I could make out, it was a great, bare, solid-looking building, more like an institute of some sort than an ordinary country mansion. Under my companion's guidance, I backed the horse and trap into an out house, and following him round to the front ascended a flight of broad stone steps. Instead of knocking, he took a heavy key from his pocket, unlocked the door, and standing aside motioned me to enter.

On getting inside, my first impression was that I had stepped straight into one of the reception rooms. There was a shaded lamp on a table in the centre, a huge fireplace at one end, with a log fire blinking and flickering in the grate. The stranger advanced to the table, and turned up the lamp. I then saw that I stood in an immense square hall, so lofty that the ceiling was almost completely lost in shade. The furniture was of massive black oak, embellished with quaint designs, upon which the firelight played with a weird effect. The polished oaken floor was strewn with costly skins, and whenever I happened to look down, the extended jaws and gleaming white teeth of a tiger, or some other savage brute, met my gaze. High up in front, and extending round both side walls, was a gallery, from under the dark shade of which skeleton heads of stags, with their great branching antlers, stared out at me.

While I was making a mental note of these particulars, my companion strode to the fire, threw on some fresh logs, and motioned me to a seat. All the time he kept his head slightly turned away from me, as if anxious to avoid my gaze. I drew my chair forward and warmed my numbed fingers at the blaze, waiting for him to open the conversation. Instead of doing so, however, he began to pace up and down the hall, with his hands clasped behind his back. At every step I could hear the water squelching in his boots.

I watched him intently over my shoulder. Gradually his manner changed. He appeared agitated and distressed; his fingers worked nervously, and a half-stifled exclamation broke from him more than once. His movements, too, betrayed the conflict which was

raging in his mind, at times his step was slow and halting, then so rapid that he crossed from end to end of the hall in a few hasty strides. It seemed to me as if he was fighting against some impulse, which he strove to keep down, and yet I could see it was gradually asserting its influence over him. I waited in silent expectation, wondering what was coming.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me——," I began at length.

Pausing in the midst of a stride, he turned quickly round, and for the first time looked me full in the face.

"Yes, I will tell you," he broke in, vehemently. "You want to know the cause of my suffering? It is this! *I am possessed by a devil!*"

I do not think it was this extraordinary assertion, startling as it undoubtedly was, which made me catch my breath with a quick gasp. It was the horror, the anguish of mind, depicted on his face. And the eyes! Good heavens! how their look has haunted me! How often since I have seen it in my dreams! They were set in a fixed stare—not *at*, but *beyond*, me—as if he had lost the power of focusing his sight. And still he seemed to be making painful yet hopeless efforts to concentrate his gaze, as if striving to read my expression, when my features must have appeared blurred and dim to him. I have looked upon many distressing sights in my time, but none that filled me with such cold horror as that. I believe I must have shuddered as I turned away my head.

"This is no childish fancy, I assure you," he went on, gravely; "it is a horrible reality! I have striven to keep it secret, I have tried to bear the torture of mind and body in silence. But of late my sufferings have grown intolerable; I feel that I must speak, must reveal that which I thought no power on earth would have drawn from me—or go mad! Hear what I have to say, in patience, for I tell you beforehand you will need to exercise self-control; and then, if you see one gleam of hope in the dark future, speak, for Heaven's sake! and save me from this lingering death."

"I AM POSSESSED BY A DEVIL!"

He sat down opposite me at the other side of the great fireplace, and rested his head wearily upon his hand. Sometimes starting up to pace the floor, sometimes leaning moodily against one of the pillars which supported the gallery, he told me his singular story.

"I will not attempt to disguise the facts," he began, "even when they tell most strongly against me. It is my desire that you should know the naked truth. Let me again entreat you to hear me out in silence.

"My father was a colonel in the service of the old East India Company, and in the troublous times before the Mutiny held a responsible post in a district notorious for crime, conspiracies, and outrages of all kinds. In dealing with these offences he seems to have been in his element. I don't know whether a long residence in such an isolated spot, where scenes of this sort were of daily occurrence, hardened his nature, but certainly he appears to have grown as harsh, as despotic, and as cruel as any of the native princes, whom, it would

seem, he strove to emulate by living in semi barbaric state.

"Much to the surprise of his few friends—he had made enemies of most of his fellow-countrymen out there—he married late in life. As in many cases of the kind, he chose a wife at least five-and-twenty years younger than himself. If the union ever was a happy one—which I very much doubt—the first twelve months sufficed to bring about a separation. What the exact cause of the quarrel was I never learned; it may have been due to a violent and tyrannical temper on one side and a proud, haughty spirit on the other. Be this as it may, the separation took place soon after I was born; my mother went from us, and I was left to the tender mercies of native servants. I have been told that she died shortly afterwards.

"If my father ever had a particle of affection for me, he kept it entirely to himself. For the most part he appeared utterly indifferent to my existence, but as I grew up there were times when he drove me harshly from his presence, as if he could not endure me within sight. In some respects I followed in his footsteps, for even at that early age I was a petty tyrant among the host of servants.

"In the course of his administration my father had amassed a considerable fortune, and before retiring, determined to visit England in order to settle his affairs. I was left behind; I believe the thought of having me tacked on to him during the voyage home was intolerable. In his absence, the Mutiny broke out. I went through the horrors of that awful time, I witnessed the bloodshed, I saw many a gaping wound, many a mutilated corpse. I took my share in the fighting whenever I got the chance; I stood by when the captured rebels were blown from the guns; but through it all I was conscious of a callousness, an indifference to suffering, which appalled me at times. I have looked unmoved upon sights from which even grey haired veterans turned away with a shudder.

"When it was all over, my father's Indian agents sought me out, and I was sent to join him in England. On my arrival he grimly remarked that, as I had shown such an aptitude for fighting, I could not do better than adopt it as a profession; in other words, he suggested I should enter the Army. I fell in readily with this proposal. My father had bought this place and settled down here, but never relented towards me—always kept me at a distance. Though I remained in England ten years, I never once set foot inside these doors. On his death, as no will was forthcoming, I inherited the bulk of his fortune. Even then I shunned the house and all connected with it; as you may imagine, it had no pleasant associations for me. Not until the last few weeks, when circumstances drove me here, did I ever inhabit it for a single night.

"My life in the Army was such as might have been expected from my early training. I cared nothing for society, I hated its hollow shams, I found the monotony of the ordinary garrison town irksome in the extreme. But wherever there was fighting, wherever there was fierce excitement, I was sure to be in the thick of it. I mixed with a rough set; and the instincts—brutal, if you like to call them—which had been developed in me from boyhood, got a firmer hold over me. I believe I was shunned by most, feared by many, and liked by few. All this gave me little concern, however.

"It was soon after I had got my company, and was serving with my regiment in India, that an event occurred which altered the whole course of my life. I was present one day at a race meeting, which was held at a quiet, up-country station. There was a good attendance, in spite of the scorching heat.

"Just before the principal race I noticed a stir among the fashionable throng in the inclosure. Whispers were exchanged, and heads turned towards the entrance. I looked round, wondering what it was all about. Walking by the side of an elderly lady I saw a beautiful girl—evidently a stranger—whose appearance was quite enough to account for the sensation. I found myself joining in the general admiration and eagerly inquiring her name. I was told she was a Miss Egerton, a new arrival, who was staying on a visit at the station.

"When the race was over, the company began to file off to the refreshment-tents. A fair sprinkling still remained upon the ground. I happened to be standing near Miss Egerton, when I heard someone yell 'Look out!' Instantly there was a rush for the gates, shrieks and shouts filled the air, and the utmost confusion prevailed. I saw at once what had occurred.

"A horse belonging to one of the stewards, which had been tied to the railings, had broken loose, and came charging madly across the inclosure, scattering the people to the right and left. The brute must have been maddened by the heat, for he snapped viciously at everyone he passed who only

just managed to avoid him. He was making straight for the spot where we stood.

"I had taken one step aside, when I saw to my horror that Miss Egerton did not move, though all the rest had fled. She seemed to be paralyzed with terror. The horse was almost upon her, I could see the ears laid flat against his head, the red glare in his eyes, and the savage jaws open—ready to crunch the girl's shoulder. With a spring I was at her side, and shot out my arm between them. The brute's teeth closed upon it; he swerved slightly, dragging me

"THE BRUTE'S TEETH CLOSED UPON IT."

with him, and worrying me like a dog. My arm was frightfully mangled when they got me free, but the girl had escaped uninjured. She had fainted, I was told, and had gone home with her friends.

"She insisted, however, upon returning to the ground immediately, and stood by all the time the surgeon was dressing my arm. She even assisted him with the bandages, for it seems she had some experience as a nurse. When I felt the gentle touch of her hand, when I looked at the fair face, quivering with emotion, and saw the beautiful eyes dimmed with tears, a thrill of rapture went through me. I spoke to her, I begged her not to distress herself on my account, I assured her the pain was nothing. Pain! I would have borne it twenty times over to have her near me!

"When I got back to my bungalow, my whole thought was—when should I see her again? I could not rest, night and day her face was before me. I heard she was staying with an officer's wife—the lady who had accompanied her to the races—and that they drove round daily to inquire for me. After that, I used to listen for the sound of the wheels every evening, it was something to look forward to during the weary hours.

"At the end of the first week I began to feel the restraint intolerable. Though the surgeon declared that if I ventured out in my present state, he would not answer for the consequences, I paid little heed to his caution. That evening, with my arm in a sling, I made my way across to the bungalow where Miss Egerton was staying.

"How well I remember the bright smile with which she greeted me, and how tenderly she gazed at my crippled arm, as if to remind me that it was for her sake I had suffered the injury! I went home that night with fever in my veins — the fever of a fierce, overwhelming passion. I was desperately — madly — in love with this girl. Before the week was out I had told her of it. I believe she was almost frightened at first by the vehement manner in which I declared my love for her, but I went away and gave her time to think the matter over. Next day she consented to be my wife.

"When the engagement became known, one or two of those with whom I was on intimate terms ventured to hint, in a friendly sort of way, that I ought to ascertain something of the girl's family. It appears she was an orphan, and her friends at the station knew little or nothing about her relations. But this did not trouble me much, what the world might say or think was a matter of

perfect indifference to me We were married at Umballah a month later

"In the two brief, happy years that followed I was a changed man My old pursuits had lost their power to attract me, my old associates dropped off one by one. I no longer thirsted for the excitement of a tiger hunt, though, formerly, if a terrified native had come in to report that there was a man-eater in the neighbourhood, I often sallied forth alone in search of the brute. A new life had opened up for me; the softening and refining influence of home—the only one I had ever known, remember — was weaving its spell around me. I was never happy away from it—always longing to get back to my beautiful wife

"When our little daughter was born, there seemed to be nothing left for which I could wish. I was conscious of new hopes, new aspirations, new emotions; it seemed as if out of my stony nature a tender shoot had sprung up, which grew and flourished under the warm sunshine of love until it bore these fruits. Sometimes, in the hush of an evening, as I stole into my wife's room, and bent over the tiny cradle there, I have felt a mist dim my sight—I, whose eyes, even in childhood, were never wet except with the burning tears of passion

"It all changed! There came a time when the light went out, and darkness settled upon my soul. That tender growth which had taken root in my heart was blasted by the stroke of fate, and withered like Jonah's gourd. It happened when we were on a visit to a hill station during the hot season.

"Soon after we arrived there, I began to notice a change in my wife's manner. She no longer greeted me in the old affectionate way; she was often silent and preoccupied in my presence, failing to respond to, if not actually shunning, my caresses. It seemed as if she was keeping something back from me—something which no effort of mine could draw from her. As the days went on, I grew restless and irritable; a gloomy foreboding that our happiness was in jeopardy preyed upon my mind. And then, one morning, the blow fell! It came in the shape of an anonymous letter, and contained these words: '*Take a friend's advice and keep a sharp eye on your wife.*'

"That was all, but it was quite enough. The iron had entered into my soul, and rankled there. Without waiting for her to appear, I left the breakfast untouched, and walked straight out of the house. I stalked off through the burning heat, maddening thoughts surging through my brain. Heedless of the scorching rays that beat down upon me, I wandered on and on, until I had left the station far behind. It was late in the afternoon when I returned, outwardly calm, but with a thirst for vengeance in my soul. Every gentle feeling seemed to have died out during that walk.

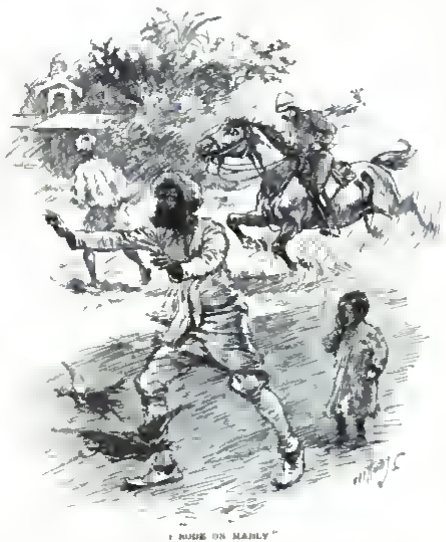
"I said nothing, but determined to keep a strict watch. I soon discovered that, wherever my wife went, she invariably met a certain stranger, with whom she eagerly conversed. Imagine what I felt, when I saw her face brighten at his approach—I, who begrudged every look, every word, she bestowed upon another!

"I found, on inquiry, that this man was a Government official, named George Noble. He was well known at the station, and seemed to be a universal favourite, for he was commonly referred to as 'Noble George.' One morning, in a sudden burst of rage, I strode up to him, and taunted him in a way that I thought none but a coward would have stood. He looked surprised and indignant, the wretch, but kept perfectly cool, merely remarking that I must be mad. But for the fact that one or two officers who knew me happened to be present, and interfered to prevent a scene, I believe I would have killed him on the spot. After that, he was very careful to avoid me.

"A few nights later there was a ball at the Residency, to which we were invited. Noble was there, but studiously avoided us all the evening. Just as we were leaving, however, I saw him approach my wife through the crush, and slip a packet into her hand. She gave him a grateful look, and thrust it under her cloak.

"On the way home, I never opened my lips to her. I left her at the door, though she begged me to come in—said there was something she wished to tell me—but I turned from her harshly, and strode away. I ordered my servant to saddle my horse, told him I might not be back for a day or two, and galloped off through the sultry night. Once only I turned my head, and there, in the light of the doorway, I saw the dim outline of her figure.

"Hour after hour I rode on madly—recklessly, for my brain seemed on fire. When morning came, and the blazing sun got up, I was still on the dusty road. In every village the astonished natives flew out of the way, on seeing an officer, in undress uniform, go tearing past on a horse reeking with foam. Never once did I draw rein, not even when



"I RODE ON MANLY"

the exhausted brute which bore me was catching his breath in great spasmodic gasps. He dropped under me at last. Drawing a revolver, which happened to be in the holster, I bent down and put a bullet through his brain. Then I started to walk home.

"I did not get back until late that night. Though there was a brilliant moon, I managed to approach the house unobserved, and let myself in quietly. I paused to listen; not a sound, save that of regular breathing, reached me from any part of the building. I made my way to the dining room, and poured glass after glass of brandy down my parched throat. I flung myself into a chair, and tried to collect my thoughts. One thing I vowed—solemnly vowed—she should never look that man in the face again.

"But how was I to prevent it? If I forced her away, it was open to him to follow; and they might easily contrive means of meeting when my back was turned. It was then, as I sat there in the silence and solitude, striving to devise some way of accomplishing my end, no matter at what cost; it was then that I seemed to become suddenly conscious of an invisible presence. I heard the words—or rather they appeared to burn themselves into my brain—*The Five Destroyers!*

"I knew well what they meant, those three terrible words. I did not shrink from the idea they suggested; I did not thrust it from me as horrible and revolting, for the devil had already taken possession of my heart. I got up and walked across the room to a cabinet. Out of a secret drawer I took five small phials, each labelled with a different name. I selected one and replaced the rest.

"Let me explain to you briefly what these phials contained. As I daresay you know, there are strange secrets in Indian pharmacy, which, for the most part, are very jealously guarded. Some of the Fakirs tell you there is no function of the human body which they cannot destroy with their drugs. They can blot out a man's memory; they can reduce him from the full possession of his mental powers to a state of hopeless idiotcy.

"Once, when travelling through a wild district in the North West Provinces, I happened to come across one of these Fakirs, who was renowned for his knowledge of drugs. I chanced to render him some slight service, for which he was intensely grateful. It was from him I obtained (not without considerable difficulty, though) the drugs known as 'The Five Destroyers,' each of which, he declared, would destroy one of the five senses.

"There is no need for me to tell you which of the phials I selected. I held it up in the moonlight, and gazed at it with fierce exultation. Then I stole out, and groped my way into my wife's bedroom. I stood in the shadow of the wall, for the moon's beams filtered through the blinds. She was in a restless, troubled sleep. I saw her lips move. I held my breath and listened. There was a low, indistinct murmur; and then the word '*husband*' came floating across the room to me. For an instant my resolution wavered. But the next second, in clear, rapturous tones, I heard the exclamation, 'Noble George!'

"I hesitated no longer. I went from the room, and returned with a bottle of chloroform. I let her inhale the powerful fumes; and then—then—Oh, my God!"

He was on his feet in an instant, his head thrown back, and his hands clutching his brow as if to keep it from bursting.

"Yes! yes! I did it!" he moaned. "I poured one drop of the sight-destroyer into each eye, and rushed from the house. I waited outside, waited till the day dawned, waited till I heard shriek after shriek come from her room, and knew that the drug had done its work—that she was blind! blind! blind!"

Strong man as he was, I saw him lurch forward, and fall prone on the floor. With a shuddering horror, which made me reluctant even to touch him, I went to his assistance. I lifted him up, and guided him back to his seat.

"I can tell you little of what occurred afterwards," he added, presently. "I believe I was found wandering about in the sun that day without a hat. Brain fever followed. Whether it was weeks or months that elapsed before I pulled through, I don't know. My memory is not very clear upon these points.

"I RETURNED WITH A BOTTLE OF CHLOROFORM."

"I have an impression regarding that man Noble, though how I got it I cannot say. The story may have been actually told to me, it may have come to me in my delirium, or in a dream. It is entirely opposed to the idea that there was any intrigue between him and my wife. It explains the secret of their intimacy in this way. Her brother, who was never a credit to his family, had been guilty of forgery and fraud. Noble was the principal sufferer; but for her sake (it appears he had known her from childhood) he determined to shield the culprit from exposure. Not only so, but he sent him out of the country at his own expense, so as to give him a chance of making a fresh start. The packet he had slipped into my wife's hand that night contained nothing more than the evidences of her brother's guilt; and she intended to reveal the whole story to me when we got home.

"I did not—I *could* not—accept this version of the affair. I felt no sting of sorrow, no compunction for what I had done. I wandered about from place to place, seeking rest, but finding none. And, it is strange, but I have a sort of vague idea that wherever I went I was followed by my blind wife and little daughter.

"I think it was about a year afterwards, as I was sitting alone one day, brooding over the past, that I felt a sudden dart of pain shoot through my eyes. It was just as if two red-hot needles had been driven into them. It passed off quickly, but my sight appeared blurred for some little time. I put it down to the glare of the sun, for I had just come in from a long walk, and thought no more of it.

"A month or so later, however, I had an attack of a similar kind. After that, I grew alarmed, I began to dread a return of that burning pain, and made up my mind to consult an oculist. I came back to England for this purpose. The specialist assured me he could discover nothing wrong with my sight, but advised me to remain for the next few weeks in a darkened room. I did so, and it made no difference. The piercing, burning pangs sought me out there. It was then I knew that I was doomed—doomed by an inexorable fate which demanded 'an eye for an eye.'

"I found, too, that I could not sleep at night. No sooner did I begin to doze than I started up in horror, roused by a woman's piercing shriek. I looked forward to the hours of darkness with positive terror, for it was then my torments were most acute. In despair I determined to turn the day into night, and the night into day.

"And yet, in spite of all this, I did not repent. I strove to do so, strove with all the power of my soul, for I felt that repentance alone might save me from this awful fate. But it was too late—too late! My stubborn heart never yielded. I would have welcomed the acutest pangs of remorse, but remorse was far from me. I longed for one solitary tear-drop—one trace of moisture to cool these burning eyes—but tears would not come. And now I have lost all hope!"

When he ceased to speak, there was a painful silence, for I knew not what to answer. His extraordinary story had made a profound impression upon me; it had been told in such a way that he seemed to carry me with him step by step. Once, as we sat there facing each other, I thought I heard a light footstep in the gallery overhead.

"If what you have told me is true," I said, at length, "my belief is, that your sufferings are purely imaginative."

"They are not. I tell you they are not!" he cried.

I stood up, and began to button my coat.

"Well, if you call upon me to-morrow, I will examine your eyes," I went on. "At present I fear I can do nothing for you."

"There is one thing you can do," he said, with strange significance.

"What is it?"

"Destroy my sight at once. It would be infinitely preferable to this slow torture. Besides, I should then be on a level with *her*."

For answer, I simply walked towards the door. But he was before me, and confronted me with fierce determination.

"Will you do it?" he cried.

"Certainly not."

"You must! I say you must!"

"You are mad!"

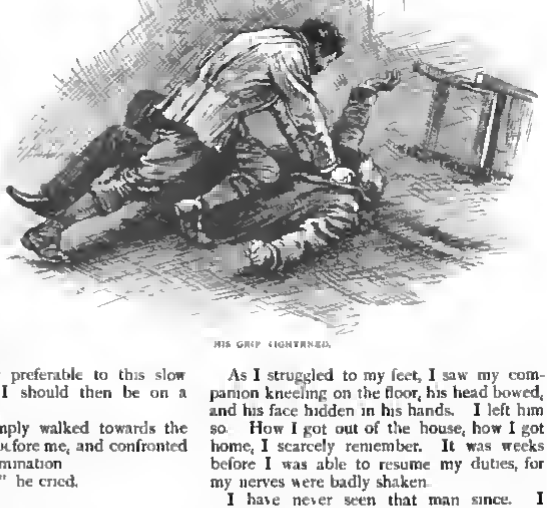
With a sudden spring he was upon me, and bore me to the ground. I felt his knees crushing my chest; I felt his iron fingers gripping my throat. Good heavens! He was strangling me!

"Will you consent?"

I shook my head.

His grip tightened. I gasped for breath—I was choking! My tongue was hanging out, and the eyes seemed to be starting from my head.

Just then, when I had given myself up for lost, I felt his fingers relax slightly. Slowly, as if he were being drawn back by some invisible power, he released me. I heard a sound of sweet melody somewhere overhead. I looked up to the gallery, and there I saw, or thought I saw, a child——a lovely, golden haired little thing, clad in a long white robe. She was warbling a childish hymn, which seemed to breathe a calm, to soothe the troubled spirit. Was it imagination, or did I really see the white face of a beautiful woman in the back-ground?



HIS GRIP TIGHTENED.

As I struggled to my feet, I saw my companion kneeling on the floor, his head bowed, and his face hidden in his hands. I left him so. How I got out of the house, how I got home, I scarcely remember. It was weeks before I was able to resume my duties, for my nerves were badly shaken.

I have never seen that man since. I heard the house was shut up again, and no one knew where he had gone. Was his strange story true? If so, did the tears for which he yearned come to him that night? I hope so.

FROM THE GERMAN OF
W. HAUFF.

IN the time of Haroun Al-Raschid, ruler of Bagdad, there lived in Balsora a man, Benezar by name. His means enabled him to live quietly and comfortably, without carrying on a business or trade; and when a son was born to him he made no change in his manner of living. "For," said he, "what will feed two, will feed three." Said, for so they called the boy, soon made a name for himself among his playmates as a lusty fighter, and was surpassed by none in riding or swimming.

When he was eighteen, his father sent him on a pilgrimage to Mecca, and before he started gave him much good advice, and provided him with money for his journey. Lastly he said:—

"There is something more I must tell you, my boy. I am not the man to believe that fairies and enchanters, whatever they may be, have any influence over the fate of mankind; that sort of nonsense is only good for whiling away the time; but your mother believed in them as firmly as in the Koran. She even told me, after making me swear never to reveal the secret except to her child, that she herself was under the protection of a fairy. I always laughed at her, but still I must confess that some very strange events happened at your birth. It rained and thundered all day, and the heavens were black with clouds.

"When they told me that I had a little son, I hastened to see and bless my first-born, but I found my wife's door shut, and all her attendants standing outside. I knocked, but with no result. While I was waiting there, the sky cleared, just over Balsora, although the lightning still flashed and writhed round the blue expanse. As I was gazing in astonishment at this spectacle, your mother's door flew open and I went in alone. On entering the room, I perceived a delicious odour of roses, carnations, and hyacinths. Your mother Zemira showed me a tiny silver whistle, that was hanging round your neck by a gold chain as fine as silk. 'This is the fairy's gift to our boy,' she said. 'Well,' I laughed, 'I think she might have given him something better than that—a purse of gold, for instance, or a horse.'

"But Zemira begged me not to anger the good fairy, for fear she might turn her blessing to a curse; so, to please her, the matter was never mentioned again till she was dying. Then she gave me the whistle, telling me never to part with you till you were twenty, when the whistle was to be yours. But I see no objection to your going away now. You have common-sense, and can defend yourself as well as any man of four and twenty. Go in peace, my son. Think ever of your father in good fortune or in ill, and may Heaven defend you from that last."

Said took an affectionate farewell of his father, and placing the chain round his neck, sprang lightly into his saddle, and went off to join the caravan for Mecca. At last they were all assembled, and Said rode gaily out of Balsora. Just at first the novelty of his position and surroundings occupied his thoughts, but as they drew near to the desert he began to consider his father's words. He drew out the whistle and put it to his lips, but, wonder of wonders, no matter how hard he blew, not a sound came out! This was disappointing, and Said impatiently thrust the whistle back into his girdle; still the marvellous had a strange attraction for him, and he spent the whole day in building his airy castles.

Said was a fine-looking fellow, with a distinguished face, and a bearing which, young as he was, marked him out as one born to command. Everyone was attracted to him, and especially was this the case with an elderly man, who rode near him. They entered into conversation, and it was not long before the mysterious power of fairies was mentioned.

"Do you believe in fairies?" asked Said, at last.

"Well," replied the other, stroking his beard thoughtfully, "I should not like to say that there are no such beings, although I have never seen one." And then he began to relate such wonderful stories, that Said felt that his mother's words must have been true, and when he went to sleep was transported to a veritable fairyland.

The next day the travellers were dismayed to see a band of robbers swooping down on them. All was confusion in an instant, and they had scarcely had time to place the women and children in the centre, when the Arabs were upon them. Bravely as the men acquitted themselves, all was in vain, for the robbers were more than four hundred strong. At this dreadful moment Said bethought him of his whistle, but, alas, it remained dumb as before, and poor Said, dropping it hastily, fired on a man, who seemed from his dress to be of some importance.

"What have you done?" cried the old man, who was fighting at his side. "There is no hope for us now."

And so, indeed, it seemed—for the robbers, maddened by the death of the man, pressed so closely on the youth that they broke down even his sturdy resistance. The others were soon overcome or slain, and Said found himself on horseback, bound and guarded by armed men. These treated him with roughness, and the only drop of comfort in his cup was that his old friend was riding near. You may be sure his thoughts were not very pleasant—slavery or death was all he had to look forward to.

After riding for some time, they saw in the far distance trees and tents, and in a short time they were met by bands of women and children, who had no sooner heard the news than they began to throw sticks and clods of earth at Said, shrieking, "That is the man who killed the great Almansor, bravest of men, he must die, and we will throw his body to the jackals."

They became so threatening that the bandits interfered, and, bearing off their prisoner, led him bound into one of the tents. Here was seated an old man, evidently the leader of the band. His head was bent.

"The weeping of the women has told me all—Almansor is dead," said he.

"Almansor is dead," answered the robbers, "oh, Mighty One of the Desert, but here is his murderer. Only speak the word. Shall his doom be to be shot, or to be hanged from the nearest tree?"

But the aged Selim questioned Said, and found that his son had been slain in fair fight. "He has done, then, no more than we ourselves should have done. Loose his bonds. The innocent shall not die," cried Selim, in his sternest tones, seeing his men's reluctance and discontent. As for Said, the very fulness of his heart closed his lips, and he could not find words in which to thank his deliverer. From this time he lived in Selim's tent, almost taking the place of that son whose death he had caused.

But sedition was rife among the robbers. Their beloved Prince had been murdered, and his murderer was shielded by the father! Many the execration hurled at Said as he walked in the camp; indeed, several attempts were made on his life. At length Selim perceived that soon even his influence would not be sufficient to guard the young man, and so he sent him away with an escort, saying that his ransom had been paid. But before they started he bound the robbers by a dreadful oath that they would not kill Said.

It was indeed a terrible ride! Said saw that his guides were performing their task with great reluctance, and soon they began to whisper together. He nerved himself to listen, and what he heard did not tend to reassure him.

"This is the very spot," said one. "I shall never forget it."

"And to think that his murderer still lives!"

"Ah! if his father had not made us take that oath!"

"Stay," cried the most forbidding-looking of all, "we have not sworn to bring this fellow to the end of his journey. We will leave him his life, but the scorching sun and the sharp teeth of the jackal shall perform our vengeance. Let us bind him and leave him here."

Said, hearing this brutal suggestion, made a desperate effort for his life. Spurring his horse, he rode off at full speed; but the bandits soon recovered from their amazement, and, giving chase, had him at their mercy. Tears, prayers, even bribes were of no avail, and the wretched Said was left to face death in its most painful form. Higher and higher mounted the sun, and Said tried to roll over to obtain some small relief. In doing this the whistle attracted his notice, and he contrived to get it between his lips, but for the third time it refused its office, and Said, overcome by the heat and the horror of his situation, fainted. After several hours he awoke to see, not the dreaded beast of prey, but a human being.

AFTER SEVERAL HOURS HE AWOKE

This was a little man, with small eyes and a long beard, who informed Said, when the latter had somewhat recovered, that he was Kalum Bek, a merchant, and that he was on a business expedition when he found him lying half dead in the sand. Said thanked the little man, and gratefully accepted a seat on his camel. As they were journeying the merchant related many stories in praise of the justice and acuteness of the Father of the Faithful.

"My cousin Messour," he said, "is his Lord Chamberlain, and he has often told me how the Caliph is wont to sally forth at night, attended by himself alone, to see how his people are cared for. And so, when we go about the streets at night, we have to be polite to every idiot we meet, for it is as likely to be the Caliph as some dog of an Arab from the desert."

Hearing such accounts as these, Said thought himself a lucky fellow to have the chance of seeing Bagdad and the renowned Al-Raschid. When they arrived in the city, Kalum invited Said to accompany him home. The next day the youth had just dressed himself in his most magnificent clothes, thinking of the sensation he would cause, when the merchant entered, and, looking at him scornfully, said: "That is all very fine, my young sir, but it seems to me you are a great dreamer. Have you the money to keep up that style?"

"It is true, sir," said Said, blushing, "that I have no money; but perhaps you will be kind enough to lend me sufficient to travel home with, for my father is sure to repay you."

"Your father, boy," laughed the merchant. "I really think the sun must have affected your brain. You don't suppose, do you, that I believe the fable you made up for my benefit? I know all the rich men in Balsora, but no Benezar. Besides, do you think the disappearance of a whole caravan would pass

unnoticed? And then, you bare-faced liar, that story about Selim! Why, that man is noted for his cruelty, and do you mean to tell me that he allowed the murderer of his son to go free—and that, too, without ransom? Oh, you shameless liar!"

"Indeed, I have spoken the truth," cried Said. "I have no proof of my words, and can only swear to you that I have spoken no falsehood. If you will not help me, then I must appeal to the Caliph."

"Really!" scoffed the little man, "you will beg, then, from no less exalted a person than our gracious Ruler! Just consider that the Caliph can only be approached through my cousin Messour, and that with a word I could——But I pity your youth. You are not too old yet for reformation. You shall serve in my shop for a year, and then, if you wish to leave me, I will pay you your wages, and let you go whither you will. I give you till midday to think over it. If you refuse, I will seize your clothes and possessions to pay myself for your passage, and throw you on the streets."

Said was indeed in difficulties; bad luck seemed to press upon him at every turn. There was no escaping from the room, for the windows were barred and the door locked. After cudgelling his brains for some time, he saw that he must submit to the indignity imposed upon him by the villainous little man, and so the next day he followed him to the shop in the bazaar. His duty was to stand (his gallant attire a thing of the past) in the doorway, a veil or a shawl in either hand, and cry his wares to the passers-by.

Said soon saw why Kalum had been so anxious to retain him as a servant. No one wished to do business with the hateful old man, but when the salesman was a handsome youth it was a different matter altogether. One especially busy day all the porters were employed, when an elderly lady entered, and made some purchases. After she had bought all she wanted, she demanded someone to carry her parcels home for her. In vain did the merchant promise to send them in half an hour—she would have them then or never; and her eye falling on Said, she wanted to know why he should not accompany her. After much remonstrance Kalum had to give in, and Said found himself following in the wake of the lady, who stopped at last before a magnificent house. She knocked and they were admitted, and after mounting a wide marble staircase, Said found himself in a lofty hall, far grander than he had ever seen before. Here he was relieved of his burden, and was just going out at the door, when—

"Said," cried a sweet voice behind him. He turned round quickly, and saw to his amazement a daintily beautiful lady surrounded by attendants, instead of the old lady he had followed.

"Said, my dear boy," she said, "it is a great misfortune that you left Balsora before

"A DAINTILY BEAUTIFUL LADY."

you were twenty, but here in Bagdad there is some chance for you. Have you still your little whistle?"

"Indeed, I have," he cried, gladly; "perhaps you are the kindly fairy who befriended my mother?"

"Yes, and as long as you are good I will help you But, alas! I cannot even deliver you from that wretch, Kalum Bek, for he is protected by your most powerful enemy."

"But can we do nothing? Can I not go to the Caliph? He is a just man and will help me."

"Haroun is indeed just, but he is greatly influenced by Messour, who, a model of uprightness himself, has been already primed by Kalum with his version of your story But there are other ways of getting at the Caliph, and it is written in the stars that you will obtain his favour."

"I am to be pitied if I have to stay much longer with that rascal of a shopkeeper But there is one favour I beg of you, most gracious of fairies. Jousts are held every week, but only for the freeborn Couldn't you manage to give me equipments, and make my face so that no one would know me?"

"That is a wish worthy of a brave man, and I will grant it. Come here each week, and you will find everything you want. And now, farewell. Be cautious and virtuous In six months your whistle will sound, and Zulima will answer its appeal."

Said took leave of his protectress, and, taking note of the position of the house, made his way back to the shop He arrived there in the very nick of time, for Kalum was surrounded by a crowd of jeering neighbours, and was literally dancing with rage This was what had happened. Two men had asked the merchant if he could direct them to the shop of the handsome salesman.

"Well! well!" said the old man, smiling, "Heaven has guided you to the right place this time. What do you want, a shawl or a veil?"

This to the men seemed nothing short of insolence, and they fell upon him tooth and nail, the neighbours refusing to help the old skinflint. But Said, seeing his master in such distress, strode to the rescue, and one of the assailants soon found himself on the ground Under the influence of his flashing eyes the crowd soon melted away, for violence on the wrong side was not to their taste.

"Oh, you prince of shopmen, that is what I call interfering to some purpose! Didn't he lie on the ground as if he had never used his legs? I should have lost my beard for ever if you had not come up. How shall I reward you?"

Said had only acted upon the impulse of the moment; indeed, he now felt rather sorry that he had deprived the scoundrel of a well-deserved thrashing. He seized the opportunity, however, and asked for an evening a week in which to take a walk This was granted him, and the next Wednesday he set out for the fairy's house. Here he found everything as Zulima had promised First the servants gave him a wash, which changed him from a stripling to a black-bearded man, whose face was bronzed by exposure to the sun. Then he was led into a second room, where he saw a dress that would not have been put to shame by the State robes of the Caliph He hastily donned this, and, magnificently equipped, descended the stairs As he reached the door, a servant handed him a silk handkerchief with which to wipe his face when he wished to rid himself of his disguise. In the court were standing three horses; two were ridden by squires, but the most magnificent was for his own use. When Said arrived on the plain set apart for the jousts, all eyes turned on him, and curiosity was rife as to who the unknown knight could be; that he was distinguished and of high family none doubted

When Said entered the lists he gave his name as Almansor of Cairo, and said that he had come to Bagdad because of the fame of the youths of that city. The sides were chosen, and the opposing parties charged. Said's horse was as swift as an eagle, and his prowess with the sword was so great that even the bravest shunned meeting him, and the Caliph's brother, who had been on his side, challenged him to single combat. The two fought, but were so equal that the contest had to be postponed till the next meeting. On the following day all Bagdad was ringing with the praises of the gallant young knight; and little did the people guess that he was then serving in a shop in the bazaar.

At the next tournament Said carried all before him, and received from the Caliph a golden medallion hanging from a gold chain. This aroused the envy of the other youths. Was a stranger to come to Bagdad and rob them of their honour? Said noticed the signs of discontent, and observed that all viewed him askance, except the brother and son of the Caliph By a strange chance the one most bitter against him was the man he

"THE TWO FOUGHT."

had knocked down before Kalum Bek's shop. Led by this man, the others made a sudden attack on Said, who must have fallen if the Royal combatants had not rushed to his aid.

For more than four months he continued to fight in the lists, but one night as he was going home he noticed four men who were walking slowly before him. To his astonishment, he found they were speaking in the dialect used by Selim's band. He suspected that they were after no good, and so he crept nearer to hear what they were saying.

"He will be in the street to the right of the bazaar to-night, attended by the Grand Vizier," said one.

"That is good," answered the other, "there is no fear of the Grand Vizier, but I am not so sure of the Caliph—there might be some of his guard near."

"No, there won't," broke in a third; "he is always alone at night."

"I think it would be best to throw a lasso over his head," said the first.

"Very well, an hour after midnight", and with these words they separated.

"Well, I have discovered a pretty plot," thought Said, and his first idea was to go at once to the Caliph, but he remembered how Kalum had maligned him to Messour, and stopped. No, the only way was for him to defend the Caliph in person. Accordingly, when night came on, he betook himself to the appointed street, and waited to see what was going to happen. Soon the men came and concealed themselves in different parts of the street. All was quiet for half an hour, and at the end of that time one of the robbers gave a sign, for the Caliph was in sight. With one accord the band rushed upon him, but Said rose from his hiding-place, and laid about him with such hearty good-will that they were soon glad to take to their heels with all speed.

"My rescue," said the Caliph, "is no less wonderful than the attack made upon me. How did you know who I was? How did you get to know of the plot?"

Said then told how he had followed the men, and, hearing their plans, determined to frustrate their villainous intention.

"Receive my thanks," said the Caliph, "and accept this ring. Present it to-morrow at the Palace, and we will see what can be done for you."

The Vizier, too, gave him a ring, together with a heavy purse.

Mad with joy, Said hurried home, but here Kalum was awaiting him, anxious lest he should have lost his handsome servant. The little man raved at Said, but the latter had seen that his purse was full of money, and told him flatly that he would stay there no longer. He strode out at the door, leaving Kalum staring after him in open-mouthed astonishment. The next morning the merchant set the police on his track, and they brought him word that his quondam servant, dressed in a most magnificent fashion, was just setting out with a caravan.

"He has stolen money from me, the thief!" Kalum shrieked, and ordered the constable

to arrest Said. As Kalum was known to be related to Messour, his commands were promptly attended to, and poor Said found himself condemned, unheard, as having stolen the purse from his master. He was sentenced to life-long banishment on a desert island, and all his protestations of innocence were of no avail. The poor fellow was in despair, and even the stony hearted merchant put in a plea for him. He was thrown into a filthy dungeon, together with nineteen others. He comforted himself with the thought that his life would be more endurable on board ship, but here he was mistaken. The atmosphere was foul, and the men fought like wild beasts for the best places. Food and water were handed out to them once a day, and at the same time the men who had died were hauled out.

A fortnight was passed in this misery, but one day they felt the ship was tossing more than usual, and their discomfort was increased. At last the survivors burst the hatches open, but to their despair they saw that the ship had been deserted by all the crew. The storm raged even more wildly, the ship rocked and settled deeper in the water. At last it went to pieces, and Said managed to cling to the mast. After he had floated for about half an hour, he suddenly remembered his whistle. It still hung round his neck, and holding on well with one hand to the mast, he put it to his mouth, and this time it did not fail him. At the sound of the clear, sweet note, the storm ceased as if by magic, and the sea became like glass, and, what was more wonderful still, the mast by which Said was supported was changed into a huge dolphin, to his no small terror. But he soon found there was no need for him to be afraid, for the fish bore him as swiftly as an arrow through the water.

After some time Said, remembering tales of enchanters, drew out his whistle, and, blowing a shrill blast, wished for a meal. At once a table rose from the depths of the sea, and Said enjoyed the much-needed refreshment. The sun was just sinking, when he saw a large town in the distance which reminded him of Bagdad. The thought of Bagdad was not so very pleasant, but still he trusted that the fairy, who had guarded him so far, would not let him fall into the hands of Kalum Bek. As he drew nearer he noticed a large house on the bank of the river, the roof of which was crowded with men, who were all gazing in astonishment at himself. No

"A TABLE ROSE FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE SEA"

sooner had Said set foot on the land, than the fish vanished, and at the same time the servants appeared to lead him before their master. On the roof were standing three men, who questioned him in a friendly way. Said at once began to relate his story, from the time when he left Balsora, and his listeners declared that they believed him; still, they asked if he could produce the golden chain and the rings of which he had spoken.

"Here they are," said Said. "I determined not to part with them while I had life to defend them."

"By the beard of the Prophet, this is my ring, Grand Vizier—our deliverer stands before us!"

Said was overcome by finding in whose presence he was, and flung himself at the Caliph's feet. But Haroun raised him, and overwhelmed him with praise and thanks. Nothing would do but that Said must return with them to the palace, where they would conceive some plan to bring the merchant Kalum to book. On the next day Kalum himself begged for admittance to the presence of Haroun. A dispute had arisen between himself and a man of Balsora, and he asked for judgment.

"I will hear him," said the Caliph. "Said," turning to the youth as the servant left the room, "this is no other than your father. Do you hide behind that curtain, and you, Grand Vizier, fetch the magistrate who condemned Said."

In a short time Kalum entered, accompanied by Benezar, and, after the Caliph had mounted his throne, began his complaint.

"I was standing at my door a few days ago, when this man Benezar came down the street, offering a purse of gold for news of Said. I at once claimed the money, and told him how his son, for so I found him to be, had suffered the penalty for stealing a purse from me. Then the madman demanded his money back, and wanted to make me responsible for his rascal of a son."

"Bring the magistrate who condemned the youth," commanded Haroun. He was produced as if by magic. After much questioning, the justice confessed that no witness had been brought forward except the purse.

"Why," shouted the Grand Vizier, "that is my purse, you scoundrel, and I gave it to the gallant youth who saved me."

"Then," thundered the Caliph, "you swore falsely, Kalum Bek. What was done to Said?"

"I sent him to a desert island," stammered the magistrate.

"Oh, Said, my son, my son!" wept the unhappy father.

"Stand forth, Said," said the Caliph.

Confronted by this apparition, Kalum and the justice flung themselves on their knees, crying, "Mercy! mercy!"

"Did you have mercy on the misfortunes of this unhappy boy? You, my best of judges, shall retire to a desert island, so that you may have an opportunity of studying justice. But, Kalum Bek, what am I to say to you? You shall pay Said for all the time he has served you, and," as Kalum was beginning to congratulate himself on coming so well out of the business, "for the perjury you shall receive a hundred strokes on the soles of your feet. Take the men away and carry out their sentence."

The wretched beings were led away, and the Caliph took Said and his father into another apartment. Here their conversation was interrupted by the yells of Kalum, who was undergoing punishment in the court outside. The Caliph invited Benezar to bring his goods and settle in Bagdad. He gladly consented, and Said spent his life in the palace built for him by the grateful Caliph—indeed, the proverb ran in Bagdad, "May I be as good and fortunate as Said, the son of Benezar."

The Chrysanthemum.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF FERNAND BEISSIER, BY E. DYKE.

I.

THE little Prince lay dying. On the previous evening, the physicians had said they could do no more, and the Emperor had thrown them all into prison, vowing by his golden crown that they should lose their heads the next day.

Then he had sought others. In every direction messengers had been dispatched, bringing with them on their return to the palace venerable men, with white beards, who solemnly nodded their heads — surmounted by caps of yellow silk — and murmured sacred words. Every one of these sages, however, proved an utter failure. Never before, declared one and all, had they encountered such a baffling and mysterious illness as this, for which, in all the Buddhist scriptures, no prescription was to be found.

The Emperor was furious. He commanded that, with necks in the cangue, they should be conducted through the town, preceded by heralds on horseback, who should publicly proclaim that these men were sentenced to an ignominious death, because, whilst pretending to be saints and sages, they had been unable to save the life of a son of the Heavens.

And now, standing by the couch of the suffering child, clad in his golden armour, with his crown upon his head and his scimitar at his side, the Emperor held his son's hand in his own and waited, but wept not. For it seemed to him a thing incredible that Death should dare to touch his child whilst *he* — the master — stood by.

Soldiers armed with sabres kept guard around the bed, standing erect and motionless in their black uniform decorated with the twelve symbolic animals. Beyond stretched the grand marble staircase, brilliantly illuminated by the chandeliers which brazen storks held in their beaks. Helmeted horse-soldiers, lance in hand, mounted guard around the palace. On the terraces, archers in war-attire shot arrows at the clouds, and the bonzes had orders to beat continually upon their drums and tom-toms. Surely, if Death should chance to pass near the palace, all this noise, this blaze of light, these sabres, arrows, and lances would suffice to frighten him away!

"THE EMPEROR HELD HIS SON'S HAND AND WAITED."

In the town life seemed suspended. The

junks, with furled sails, lay idle on the river bank, and the shops were closed. Amidst the glare of torches and blare of gongs, wailing men and women, with outstretched arms and faces pressed against the earth, prostrated themselves before a colossal stone Buddha seated upon a lotus leaf, whose clasped hands rested upon his crossed legs.

And in the Imperial chamber, under gold-embroidered silks, still lay and agonized the little Prince. His wasted chest heaved painfully, a strange, gasping sound issued from between his chattering teeth, and at times his poor little clenched hands seemed trying to throw off some invisible weight which oppressed and suffocated him.

In the adjoining apartment the Empress, surrounded by her women, who were lying upon the floor, was herself kneeling, and, in spite of the silken hangings and doors of brass, her sobs reached the ears of the sick boy. He turned gently towards his father, and, fixing on him his large, deep eyes, in which seemed now to burn a mysterious light, he inquired why his mother was not at his side, and why all those soldiers, with their big sabres, could do nothing to ease his pain.

At a sign from the Emperor, the horsemen brandished their lances, the archers made a rain-cloud of arrows around the palace, and the noise of the tom-toms was redoubled. Then, looking at his son, the Emperor said to him:—

"Sleep, little Prince, for your trusty soldiers are watching over you."

But the child's eyes remained wide open, and his breathing grew less and less distinct.

II

SUDDENLY a commotion arose at the foot of the staircase, and the Emperor turned his eyes wrathfully in that direction. Who had dared to cross the threshold of his palace at such a time? His hand, disengaging itself from that of his son, sought the hilt of his scimitar. Then a soldier appeared in the doorway, and prostrated himself before his master.

"Speak!" commanded the Emperor. "Who dares to intrude upon me?"

"An old man," replied the soldier, trembling.

"What does he want?"

"To speak with you."

"To speak with me! By my divine ancestors! I know not what restrains me from reheving you and your comrades of your heads! Return to your post, I will deal with you later."

The cowed soldier bowed and vanished. The others, immovable as brazen images, and still grasping their naked sabres, awaited calmly whatever might befall.

But now, from the top of the staircase came forward an old man. His long beard, white as snow, descended to his waist. He

"FROM THE TOP OF THE STAIRCASE CAME FORWARD AN OLD MAN."

was attired in a silken robe, which time and use had robbed of its original colour. With one hand he leaned upon a long bamboo stick, in the other he held a withered chrysanthemum flower.

The Emperor uttered an exclamation of rage, but before he could make any further sign, the stranger, stretching forth his hand, said —

"They allowed me to pass when I told them that I had come to save thy son."

"To save my son? *Thou?*"

"*I*."

And the old man regardless of the menacing soldiers, advanced towards the bed.

"By the rising sun!" vowed the Emperor, "if thou liest, I will have those who admitted thee shot to death with arrows; and for thyself, I will charge my executioners to invent the most cruel tortures!"

The old man smiled.

"When one has reached my age," remarked he, "the thread which unites soul and body is extremely fine and worn, and the iron of thy executioners would scarcely torture a corpse?"

And as the guards, at a signal from the Emperor, made way, he approached the bed.

"I come in time," he said, gazing upon the child, who now lay perfectly still and apparently unconscious; "but if thy soldiers had not permitted me to pass, thy son would have been dead at this moment."

The Emperor trembled. This old man's words impressed him strangely.

"And thy remedy?" he inquired.

"This chrysanthemum flower, which I have but to lay upon thy son's heart, and his cleansed blood shall flow with new life through his veins."

"Do so, then!"

But the old man answered, with a smile: "It is necessary that I should first know what you are willing to give me in exchange."

III

THE EMPEROR'S anger broke forth afresh.

"Wretch!" exclaimed he, "stopping to discuss the price of a service, when thou averrest danger to be so imminent! Knowest thou not that I am the master?"

"Of our *lives*, perhaps; of our *wills*, never," was the sage's calm reply to this outburst.

"He who lies there, I would have thee remember, is thy Emperor's child, the offspring of the gods who reign in the depths of the clouds!"

"Every child of man is also a child of God, and if thou wert thyself a deity, thou wouldst have no need of an old man's aid."

"I have a mind to slay thee in the first place, and then to possess myself of thy mysterious faded flower!"

"Death, as I have told you already, has for me no terror. I am now so aged—I have lived so long—that I desire nothing more than eternal repose. But in order to render my remedy efficacious, it is needful that I should apply it myself."

"Then state the number of ingots which though requirest, and they shall be paid down at once."

"Riches are but vanity, and had I wished for gold, the sacred books would have directed me where to obtain it. In the retirement of my cave, wherein I have lived without other nourishment than a few grains of ginger or nemphar, and the pure water of a brook, I have always been wealthier than thou, with thy gold-swollen coffers and Imperial treasures."

"Dost thou desire honours?"

"Wherefore should I do so? They are playthings which please youth; at my age they amuse no longer."

"Listen, then!" said the Emperor. "I will build thee a magnificent temple. One hundred columns of bronze overlaid with gold shall support the mighty roof. A thousand lanterns of iron and stone work shall be illuminated perpetually, by day and night. In the centre I will erect thy statue. Bonzes shall chant thy praises to the sound of gongs and drums, and I will punish with death everyone who refuses to bow before thee."

Again the stranger shook his head.

"Temples are built to enshrine statues of the gods, and no mere man has the right to compel another human being to worship him."

"What wilt thou, then? Tell me, and I will obey."

As the Emperor uttered these words, he bowed his head for the first time in his life. He continued —

"Dost thou covet the half of my kingdom?—my palace?—my cavaliers in silver armour?"

But the old man still shook his head. Suddenly the sick child gave a long sigh, his hands stiffened, his head drooped, his mouth opened, but no sound came there from.

"He is dead!" cried the Emperor. And flinging his sceptre at the old man's feet, he exclaimed —

"Take *that*, if it is the supreme power

which you ask! To me it is good for nothing, seeing that I am powerless to shield my own son from pitiless Death!"

Falling upon his knees, he pressed his lips upon the child's ice-cold hands, while tears rained from his eyes.

The soldiers, astounded at beholding their Emperor weep, knelt also. The noise of the tom-toms ceased suddenly. A great silence brooded now over the vast, richly-decorated chamber, where the only person who remained standing was the aged, white-bearded mendicant. The sun shone into the room, and his cheerful rays glinted upon the arms of the soldiers and the gold embroideries. Without, on the camellias and bamboos of the Imperial garden, the birds were carolling gaily. Their songs were for a moment the only sounds which broke the solemn silence within.

Then the old man extended his hand, and gently laid the chrysanthemum first upon the lips, afterwards upon the heart, of the little patient. The remedy took immediate effect. The still heart went to work again, the lips regained their colour, the limbs relaxed, and the young Prince raised his head.

"TAKE THAT, IF IT IS THE SUPREME POWER WHICH YOU ASK!"

Surprised at the sight of the kneeling figures around him, he asked —

"Why do you weep, my father? Is it not the hour at which I am accustomed to go down into the garden with my tutor?"

The Emperor uttered a loud cry

"A miracle!" he exclaimed. "My child lives!" and, taking his son into his arms, he covered him with kisses. Then, turning towards the soldiers, he said:—

"Go! summon the Empress; then hasten to the town, and proclaim to all that I order a general rejoicing. The Prince is saved! There must be illuminations at night. My treasurers shall perambulate the streets, scattering gold and silver money to the populace. All the bells are to be rung, and in the temples the bonzes shall sing the praises of the merciful gods to the accompaniment of the festal gongs. As for thee," he continued, addressing the old man, "thou shalt not be forgotten. From this day forward thou shalt sit at my right hand, on my throne, and thy lightest wish shall be esteemed a command by all."

Once more the old man smiled.

"I have need of nothing," he said, "and crave one boon only—to be allowed to return whence I came. Ere long, I hope to enter upon my eternal rest. It is not *I*, moreover, who have saved thy son: *thou* hast saved him thyself; for thou hast offered unto the gods the two things which alone can move their infinite pity. Thou hast bent the knee and shed a tear."

And as he passed out through the ring of soldiers, who saluted him with lowered weapons, he paused, with uplifted forefinger, upon the threshold, for one parting word of counsel:—

"Never forget that above thee there exists a supreme Master, in Whose eternal balance a single tear far outweighs all the arms of thy soldiers, thy crown, and all thy treasures."

The Emperor bowed humbly as he answered:—

"I thank thee, my father!"

"'A MIRACLE!' HE EXCLAIMED."

The Pioneers of Pike's Peak.

By Basil Tozer

IT was a perfect night, about the end of June, the sort of night common enough in Colorado at that time of the year. I remember it, for at the end of the game I rose from the card table and strolled out into the cool, refreshing air. Overhead the stars were shining with extraordinary brilliancy in a sky so clear that one seemed almost to hear them winking. The moon had not yet risen above the range of mighty peaks which tower into the heavens until their crests gradually vanish into great belts of clouds, and at night seem to touch the lowermost of the celestial bodies; but a sort of halo, gradually broadening, served to show that presently the moon herself would shed a flood of light from the very summit of the highest peaks down into the little village nestling at the feet of the mighty range, and now practically wrapt in slumber. No sound broke the perfect stillness without. The very houses seemed to sleep.

It was only when I re-entered the heated atmosphere of the smoky "bar room" where my companions, grown tired of card-playing, were now quietly conversing, that I noticed an odd-looking and apparently elderly stranger seated alone beside a little window at the further end of the room. The window was open, and he was staring through it vacantly, only interrupting his reverie now and again in order to blow a long cloud of smoke into the air. As I seated myself among my companions I cast a glance of inquiry in his direction.

"He came in five minutes ago," one of them answered.

"Who is he?"

"Some crank, I suppose. He has hardly stirred since he sat down there."

Though the room was a public one, only ourselves and the stranger now occupied it.

"What is he staring at?" someone asked, presently.

"Pike's Peak, apparently," replied Watson, who had called the stranger "some crank."

Though the words were spoken in an undertone, the "crank" evidently overheard them, for he turned his head and frowned. Then he resumed his former position—his vigil. Watson tapped his forehead significantly, and presently conversation drifted. It drifted from one topic to another, until the subject of American ways and customs, of America in general, of American scenery and landscapes, came uppermost.

"And who really was the first to reach the top of Pike's Peak?" Watson asked, looking round at us.

"Not Pike himself,' somebody answered, somebody who had been reading up the subject—it was Norton, I think. "They say that a man—look out, you fellows!"

For the stranger had left his seat and was approaching us with a slow, stealthy tread,

his eyes oddly dilated. As he advanced we instinctively turned to face him. A man of immense proportions, and well over six feet in height, he could not have been over fifty years of age, though he looked quite sixty. His hair was white and rather long. He had evidently been handsome in his day, but now the face, neck, and hands were disfigured with numberless little sunken blotches in some ways resembling, though in reality quite unlike, the pits left by smallpox. He wore an old drab suit, a coon cap, thick boots, and leather leggings.

"Who did you say first saw Pike's Peak?" he asked, in a threatening, hollow voice. He had dropped into a chair upon the opposite side of the table beside me. As he spoke he looked me full in the eyes, and, placing both elbows upon the table very deliberately, rested his chin upon his fists. Norton, whom he had interrupted, came to the rescue.

"I believe that——"

"*I* first saw it! But do you know the story of our ascent?"

"I know only what I have read and been told," Norton said.

"You yourself have ascended Pike's Peak?"

"I have."

"You have seen the summit, then."

"Yes."

"And what did you notice there that struck you most—there, fifteen thousand feet above the sea's level?"

"Why, scenery that was perfectly grand."

"Yes, yes, I know—grand, magnificent, marvellous scenery. I know all that. But what else did you see?"

He paused. "Surely it is there," he muttered, "surely it is still there—it must be there—it *must* be there. Who could have removed it, eh?" he continued, aloud; "who *could* have taken it away? Tell me *that*."

Norton had an inspiration. What train of thought led up to that inspiration he says that to this day he cannot guess.

"Do you mean the stone?"

Instantly the stranger's expression changed. He looked round at us all quite intelligently.

"It *is* there, then?" he inquired, eagerly, bending forward across the table.

"Of course it is there," Norton and Watson replied in one breath. "Who could have taken it away?" Watson added, glancing towards us significantly, and suppressing a smile.

We were growing interested in this poor, demented creature.

"I can give you the inscription word for word," Norton said, wishing to propitiate him.

"Do! What is it? Tell me, what is it?"

"The inscription says: '*This stone is erected in memory of William Dawkins, James Weston, and Walter Hillier, Pioneers of Pike's Peak, who were devoured by mountain rats while endeavouring to reach this summit*'"

"Ah!" he ejaculated, greatly relieved. "I am glad it is there—I am *glad* it is still there. Do you know the story of my friends, the story of those pioneers?"

He had grown suddenly calm. He seemed suddenly to have regained his reason.

"No; tell it to us," said Watson, carelessly blowing a cloud of smoke across the table. "But first, what will you take, sir? And won't you try a cigar?"

"Brandy," he exclaimed. "Then I will tell you all—all!"

Our interest and curiosity were now thoroughly aroused. We could see that the stranger was not a common brawler. He was quite sober, too, and though his mind was evidently unhinged, it was equally evident to us that he had intervals of lucidness. This seemed to be one of them. With provoking deliberation he reloaded his pipe. The glasses were refilled. We noticed that he poured brandy into his tumbler until it was three-parts full. Just then the moon shone over the summit of the famous Peak, and from where we sat the outline of the glorious mountain could be clearly discerned. Watson drew the stranger's attention to it. An odd, bitter smile flitted across his face. It was the first time that we had seen him smile. He sighed once, but did not utter a word. Again his gaze became riveted upon the gigantic Peak.

"Pike never would—never could have reached it. He tried to several times. Finally he stood upon a hill near the stalactite caves at the base of my mountain, and, pointing with his finger at the summit, said, 'No mortal man will ever tread that Peak.'"

Again he paused.

"But we—*we* were determined to. Our friends shook us by the hands and bade us farewell.

"'But you are fools,' they said. 'You will never come back. You don't know what you may meet in those mountains. You know what Pike said when he came back. You know the tales he told. And some things he would not tell.'

"'Don't go, oh! don't go,' my wife cried, in agony.

"I loved her, yet I forced her from me. She was but a unit. In the success of our enterprise lay the welfare of thousands. I told her that to comfort her. It was the last time I saw her alive. My comrades—may God help them—had no wives. 'You are married,' they had said all along, 'you should not come.' But I was determined to go. Early in the morning we started. We took with us arms, food and drink for many days, and the bare necessaries of life. We carried everything ourselves. We knew where and how Pike had failed. We should succeed.

"DON'T GO, OH! DON'T GO."

"A week later we were fairly launched, also we were fairly in the midst of difficulties. The work was terribly severe, but we had determination, strength, and courage. We had expected to find obstacles, and in this we certainly were not disappointed. Here, enormous boulders which had to be circumvented; there, unlooked for waterfalls and ravines that delayed us, besides vegetation so thick that in places we had literally to hack our way through it. All this impeded our progress enormously. And then the unknown dangers that Pike had hinted at. There might be snakes and reptiles, of sorts hitherto never heard of, concealed among those immense boulders; there might be death-dealing plants all around us—such plants flourish in South America; there might be—indeed, we did not know what there might not be. But of course we did not pause to consider these things."

He paused, however, in order to take another great gulp of brandy. It seemed to stimulate him. His eyes glistened.

"Over a fortnight went by. We were growing more and more accustomed to meeting difficulties and to overcoming them, for many obstacles at first sight insurmountable proved in the end to be less formidable than we had anticipated. And as we gradually mounted higher and higher, our spirits steadily rose as if in sympathy. Far down in the valley we had once or twice during our progress caught glimpses of this very townlet, now called Colorado Springs, also of the village of Manitou. Tiny villages, indeed, they were in those days, and as we saw them from those great heights they looked like chessboards stretched out upon the vast expanse of prairie. And still we fought our way upward, upward, always upward.

"How long our expedition had been started I cannot quite remember, when the nature of the surroundings gradually changed greatly. In place of rock and black soil we now found vast tracts of a sandy formation. The undergrowth was still dense, however, though here and there thousands upon thousands of slim fir trees lay rotting upon the ground, evidently swept down by some terrific storm—for storms in these mountains sweep down trees as a reaping machine sweeps down standing corn. Sometimes we came upon broad, open spaces—spaces swept clear apparently in early days by giant waterfalls long since dried up. Then, as we penetrated still higher, the temperature of course became colder and colder, the atmosphere more and more rarefied—the vegetation at the same time naturally decreasing in density and the trees in size. Even the boulders grew smaller. Indeed, they now looked as though in prehistoric times they had all been flung together by a tremendous seismic disturbance, many of them being crushed to pieces in the process.

"'Have you noticed,' one of my comrades remarked one day, as we prepared to rest and refresh ourselves, 'what a quantity of insects there are up here? And the rats, too, are getting more plentiful. We seldom see any of those grey squirrels now.'

"As he spoke he stamped his foot upon an immense brown spider that was running away. Its body burst with a crack, and glutinous liquid spurted out all round his boot. Almost instantly several more spiders ran out from beneath a large stone as though to ascertain what had happened. They stopped. For a moment they seemed for all the world as if they looked at us—looked at us with a malignant, vindictive expression. Then they scuttled away.

"'I believe I felt several of those spiders scampering over my face last night,' he continued. 'You fellows had better be careful, I am told they bite like the mischief. These mountains are famous for them, and—just look at that!'

"A couple of large rats were chasing an enormous spider across a long flat boulder. A moment later spider and rats disappeared over the edge.

"'They say that mountain rats will devour any living thing,' Weston said, presently. 'They will eat us if we don't watch them,' he ended in jest.

"During the earlier part of the afternoon we had made good progress, when suddenly, to our surprise, we came upon a large, sloping tract of bare white sand. The sun, still high in the heavens, shed its rays slantingly across it, and at first sight the sand seemed to be alive with small, moving bodies.

"'Talk of spiders!' Dawkins said, laughing. 'Did you ever see anything like that?'

"We had long ago, in previous expeditions, grown accustomed to surprises. Few things astonished us now. Never in our lives, however, had we seen such an assemblage of

"FOR A MOMENT THEY SEEMED AS IF THEY LOOKED AT US."

'lucky insects,' as some senseless folk call them. There must have been thousands upon thousands of them running about in every direction, colliding with one another and tumbling over one another apparently for no particular reason. The sight made me think of a gigantic ant's nest overrun with mammoth ants, and an odd sort of smell that for several days had pervaded the air, and caused us to wonder more than once whence it came, here struck our nostrils with renewed strength. The smell was the smell of spiders.

"Now, as we stepped forward into this open tract, a strange thing happened, for the entire space which a moment before had been alive became in an instant motionless. The spiders were all there, right before us, but of one accord they had stopped running. Oddly enough, too, every spider was now facing us. Instinctively we felt that we had become objects of intense curiosity. And as we stood there, interested and amused, we could distinctly see the spiders' great eyes sticking out and evidently watching us. The sight would have given women, and many a man for that matter, 'the creeps,' as I believe a certain sort of nervous affection is called. We rather enjoyed it.

"'Pish!' you hideous things,' Dawkins said, pitching a pebble into their midst. In less than a minute hardly a spider was to be seen.

"'If we describe that sight when we get back we shall be called liars, to say the least,' Weston said, glancing at his watch. 'I've seen insects in my time, but never anything like that. Why, it's past three o'clock.'

"The offensive smell was still strong in the air, and as we progressed it increased. Once or twice it became almost unbearable. We had now a long stretch of clear going before us, so we hastened to avail ourselves of it by advancing briskly. And still we saw spiders at every turn, spiders running in under every stone, spiders by the hundred sunning themselves on every rock and boulder—great brown spiders, with fat, oval bodies, and with thick, hairy legs bent in grotesque curves. I kicked over a stunted little tree that lay rotting—ugh! quite two or three hundred spiders must have scuttled away from under it.

"'This is getting beyond a joke,' Hillier, who seldom spoke and was generally considered surly, suddenly said. 'I tell you what it is: these spiders will go for us.'

"'Like Weston's rats!' Dawkins said, laughing at him; and we were still chaffing Hillier and Weston when Dawkins happened to look round.

"'Why, Harry!' he exclaimed.

"There was anxiety in his tone, and I felt his hand grip my shoulder. And no wonder. Though anything but a coward, Dawkins could not help at once realizing what we all realized a moment later, namely, that Hillier's evil omen was more than likely to come true, and, realizing at the same instant our utter helplessness should such a thing occur, a sickening sense of fear had come over him.

"For there, barely fifty yards away, a reddish-brown mass gradually assuming the form of a crescent was steadily, swiftly gliding over the sand, steadily and swiftly overtaking us. And as it approached we could see thousands upon thousands of spiders hastening towards it from every side and quickly increasing its size. The swarm when first we saw it must have covered between twelve and fifteen square feet. Before it had glided over another twenty yards of sand the entire mass was nearly one third as large again. Yet a sort of horrible fascination kept us rooted to the spot where we now stood watching the swarm approach. In order to brace up our courage we told one another that the spiders could not be pursuing us at all, that if we moved aside they would pass us by. But in our hearts we knew that we tried to think a lie. And when we moved aside in order to convince ourselves, the creeping crescent immediately swayed round towards us and seemed if anything to advance more quickly."

The stranger poured out another tumblerful of brandy, swallowed about a third of it, and, growing more and more excited, continued—

"Suddenly the intense horror of the situation flashed across my mind and struck terror into our hearts. For what could we do to avert the terrible fate that threatened us? Savage animals we might have coped with; treacherous human beings, even, we might have bested; but now we were face to face with a peril totally unexpected, utterly loathsome and unassailable.

"'Our only chance lies in flight,' Hillier said, bitterly.

"'Flight! and where shall we fly to? The top of the mountain, I suppose! Look there, Hillier.'

"It was Dawkins who spoke, and he spoke in tones of scorn. Looking round us, we now saw what we had not noticed before. We were surrounded. Everywhere we saw spiders—spiders approaching in brown, gliding crescents of varying sizes. And over a hundred yards away the largest and darkest mass of all could clearly be distinguished, also winding its way along the sand, also approaching, also inclosing us. And as this great crescent surged undulatingly, unswervingly across hillocks and irregularities in the surface of the sandy soil, it resembled the great waves of a sluggish, turbid stream leaving a factory sluice.

"'Fire into them!' I exclaimed, slipping a couple of shot cartridges into my gun. The two charges cut a lane into the approaching wave, but almost instantly the lane closed up,

and the undulating mass advanced as if nothing had happened. Together Dawkins and Weston fired four barrels. Rather a broader lane this time; but again it closed up. I had reloaded

"'Give them a volley,' Weston called out; 'that may turn them.'

"We did so; but by the time the smoke had cleared away the swarm had well-nigh resumed its normal size and shape. Could we sweep a lane with our eight barrels and then rush through it? No, that was obviously impossible; the width of the waves was too great. And still recruits were pouring in upon every side, and as we fired volley after volley into the quickly approaching swarms, in the vain hope of turning them, the distant ravines rang again and again with echoes.

For a moment the stranger stopped. His pupils were widely distended. His limbs trembled. He clutched the table frantically in order to support himself.

"Suddenly I saw several spiders run up Weston's face and fix upon his eyes. With a scream he dashed them away, but as he did so his eye began to swell, for the brutes had bitten him badly."

He stopped again. He was quivering all over with the excitement. The brandy was taking effect. Suddenly he dashed from his seat to the furthermost corner of the room.

"Keep them from me! Keep them off!" he cried, glaring wildly all round the floor. "Look at them now—look at them—ah! God help me!—help me!—*help me!*"

He sprang to right and left, then towards

"WE FIRED VOLLEY AFTER VOLLEY."

"'My God! we are done for,' came despairingly from Hillier, as for the twentieth time he closed his gun with a snap.

"Our barrels had now become almost too hot to hold, and still the hideous, crawling waves, which must have contained trillions of spiders, were fast approaching with a strange, swaying motion, and rapidly narrowing our little circle. In a few minutes they would be upon us, overrunning us, dragging us down. Already many stragglers were running up our legs and over our bodies. Now, the first swarm was so near that we could distinctly hear it rushing upon us, and—ah! the smell, how it still hangs in my nostrils . . ."

the door. Perspiration was pouring down his face. Then suddenly he snatched blindly at imaginary spiders running up his sleeves and legs, running up his body, running over his head, over his face, over his eyes, into his mouth. It was a dreadful sight.

"Stop him!" Watson cried, jumping from his seat and rushing towards him, but as he approached the maniac a blindly directed blow from the latter's fist nearly stunned him, and the inn-keeper and two rough-looking men entered the room.

"Hold him, boys," the inn-keeper said, calmly, and as the two men pounced upon the stranger the inn-keeper sauntered towards us.

"THE TWO MEN POUNCED UPON THE STRANGER.

"Poor fellow," he said, "I always have to be ready for him—look at him now, yet the doctors pronounce him sane He often is sane, of course, but when I heard him starting on the spiders, and on brandy as well, I knew what to expect."

"Is there any truth in his spider story?"

"Any truth? It's all truth, at least, that's my belief Though I was quite a lad at the time the expedition started, I can remember it well. Four of them there were, all strong and hearty when they set out Two months later *he* came back"

"Did he alone escape?"

"He alone came back—came back quite done for and disfigured all over with red blotches. Afterwards they turned into pits. Look at them now on his face and neck, but they are all over his body, too—all over every inch of him Some years later another expedition went up and reached the summit, but they always maintained that rats, not spiders, devoured those poor fellows, so they set a stone with an inscription upon it at the top of the mountain—you have seen it, no doubt?"

"What do you, yourself, think they were killed by?"

"Think? I don't think anything. As sure as you are standing there they were eaten up by swarms of great spiders, as Mad Harry has told you I have heard him tell the story often enough, and he always tells the same story, but when he drinks brandy while he's telling it he nearly always gets into that state sooner or later, and I get these men to hold him until he recovers. Besides, those marks are not rats' bites They are not a bit like rats' bites. No, I believe that what he says about the rats is true that is, that a perfect army of them suddenly came down upon the spiders and routed the lot, but not before the other three men had succumbed, or had been so sucked out of blood that they soon died of exhaustion Ah! it's a horrible place, that mountain," he said, looking at its rugged peak so clearly outlined in the moonlight "Though you can go up one side of it now by the track, easily enough, you don't know what horrors may exist in other parts of it. Many a man has gone into those mountains, but very few have ever returned"

By A. M. Donaldson

CHAPTER I

I WILL tell you of the most marvellous and unique athletic feat of modern days—if not of all time—when the prize was beyond all compare the greatest ever competed for. It is three years since the incident which I am about to describe occurred, but I am only now at liberty to tell the tale.

Harry Williams, the hero of my story, and I, Allan Parker by name, were students of law together at Edinburgh University a matter of ten years ago, and for years were inseparable. Even now, when he is a very wealthy man, and I only a journalist and writer of books, we spend at least one month in every year together. From the commencement of our friendship he inspired me with a great admiration for his many excellent qualities both of mind and body. He was at once a most distinguished student and a most distinguished athlete. His scholastic successes were soon forgotten, but his wonderful versatility as an athlete will live for years to come in the memory of his contemporaries.

In the autumn of 1894 we were invited to have some grouse shooting in the north, and sent a joint acceptance of the invitation. There was a very jolly company, including Silas K. Trotter, the American millionaire, and several others well known in the financial world.

There never was such an authority as Trotter on everything connected with sport. How he had time to make his millions and give the attention he did to sporting matters is a mystery. He could tell you off-hand the principals and the dates of all the great prize-fights of the century, the weights of the men, and the number of rounds they had fought. At his finger ends were the winners of all the classic races on the turf for the last decade. But it was chiefly in athletics and feats of endurance of every kind that his soul delighted.

One night he introduced the subject of long-distance cycling, twenty-four hours' races, and record rides from Land's End to John o' Groat's. Then arose a great argument as to the possibility of a man going without sleep for several days and nights. The majority thought it possible to do with absolutely no sleep for nearly a week, if there were sufficient reason or incentive. Trotter gave it as his opinion that six days was the limit of human endurance without insanity in a more or less pronounced form supervening. Indeed, he was most emphatic, and, to clinch the argument, said he had good reason to know, as he had privately tested some of the most likely men of the day, and had offered them a princely prize if they could, under certain easy conditions which he might afterwards divulge to us, withstand the claims of Morpheus for nearly a week. The trials had been made privately, he said, as he had no desire to have public opprobrium heaped upon him if any of the actors should have suffered seriously or gone

insane through the ordeal. For insanity, he considered, was to be feared more than anything else

Williams, who had hitherto taken little part in the discussion, here joined in with —

"Well, Mr. Trotter, just two years ago a young fellow I know intimately went sleepless for between six and seven days—something like six days and three-quarters—without the horrors of insanity descending upon him. When he did fall asleep he slept for thirty hours without a break, and from that day to this has suffered no ill effects."

In answer to Trotter's inquiries, he stated that his friend was about twenty-eight years of age, was considered a fair athlete a few years ago, and promised that he would make the trial

The gentlemen present pledged themselves to secrecy so long as Trotter remained in this country, and the last week of September was fixed as the date, the venue being Trotter's country house in Longshire Before retiring for the night Williams let me into the secret —at which I was no whit surprised—that it was he himself who was going for the prize, whatever it might be.

When by arrangement seven of the party met at Trotter's country seat, we were surprised at the excellence of his taste A three miles' drive from Longley Station took us to the lodge, and there was a further half-mile of avenue before we arrived at the house It was a fine specimen of an old English country mansion which Trotter had bought for a mere song from an impecunious baronet. We all arrived on the afternoon of Friday, the 21st of September Williams and I were the first arrivals, and by a later train came a Mr E T. Simpson, an old Oxford man, and three others—Londoners—of Stock Exchange celebrity. Their names were Duncan, Hawkins, and Robertson

Our host insisted on our having a few days' holiday before the trial He had been informed some time previously of the name of the athlete. It was of no consequence, he said, who it was, so long as he was a likely man, and it was kept private And when Williams was done, any of us who cared could come on next

We had a good time for a week. The weather was perfect, and Trotter did the honours to perfection. But there was one little grain of alloy in it He could not be persuaded to say definitely when *the event* was to come off. His reply was always that the gymnasium wasn't quite ready—that we must have just a little more patience.

At breakfast, on Friday, the 28th of September, he intimated that the gymnasium was now fixed up, if any of us cared to look at it. We didn't linger long at the table, I can assure you Trotter led us along a passage, then down about a score of steps, and then along another extremely narrow passage, and through no fewer than five doors, each heavily bound with iron, and each of which he locked before unlocking the next. Before opening the fifth of these doors he pressed on a knob outside, with the explanation that that turned on the light. He turned the key and we entered the "gymnasium"

It was the most curious gymnasium I ever saw In reality a large cellar extending under a considerable part of the house, it was so beautifully furnished and so splendidly illuminated that our first impression was that a Yankee joke was being perpetrated, and that we were the victims. The chamber was about 45ft. in length by 30ft. in breadth,

"WE ENTERED THE GYMNASIUM

while the walls were about 10ft high. The usual paraphernalia of a gymnasium were conspicuously awanting. A rich Indian carpet covered the whole of the floor, and the walls were dazzlingly white. Couches and easy chairs, upholstered in rich crimson velvet, a profusion of palms, and four miniature fountains playing completed the ornamental part of the furnishing.

At the north-east and south-west corners closely woven curtains, also of white, partitioned off small portions of the room, and when we were expressing our surprise, Trotter pressed a knob in the wall and the curtains slid to the side. The two corners were fitted up similarly. In each, on a massive iron stand, about three feet in height, was a large sphere constructed of closely woven steel. It was about four feet in diameter, and held firmly in position by four steel rods sunk into the stand and running into the ceiling.

Near the bottom was what seemed like the spigot or cock of a barrel, and hanging on the spigot was a small pail, about six or seven inches deep and two inches in diameter. The globe we were looking at was empty, but Trotter asked us to inspect the other, as it was slightly different. We crossed over. Oh, it was considerably different, and the difference lay in this—that it was full, full to the very top, with bright, glittering sovereigns! Through the interstices of the steel weaving, we saw a closely-packed mass of gold. We were gazing at a globe of sovereigns!

Words cannot describe our astonishment, which was intensified tenfold as Trotter, addressing Williams, said: "That globe contains a million sovereigns, which you can have if you carry out the little task of carrying them across the room and putting them into the globe over there. There's no difficulty about putting them in. The globe will be lowered to any position you choose, and you will drop them in by a small wooden chute at the top. But still, there are one or two conditions attached to the emptying and filling of the balls. You see this cock. It is worked on a principle borrowed from the cocks you occasionally see attached to small spirit or wine casks in good-class public-houses and restaurants. There the cock is either turned round or pressed down, and for each turn or pressure, as the case may be, a certain exact quantity of liquor runs out. When a spring at the side of this cock is released, one hundred sovereigns per minute drop into this small pail, the handle of which you see fits into a niche cut on the upper side of the cock. As it is regulated by weight, occasionally, but very rarely, an extra sovereign drops through. It actually takes about twenty seconds for the sovereigns to come through, so you have about forty seconds to carry each little load of gold across the gymnasium and drop it into the chute of the other globe. Twice a day, at intervals of twelve hours, by a very ingenious device, which was only perfected after weeks of experimenting, the machinery is stopped for six minutes. You can employ the twelve minutes per diem as you choose.

"Here" (opening a door which was flush with the wall, and which we had not previously noticed), "is a bath room fitted up for your convenience. You may have two of your friends as attendants, and my larder and wine-cellar are at your disposal. Your attendants may do anything to assist you except carrying or interfering in any way with the carriage of the sovereigns. If you happen to drop any of them on the floor you may pick them up, and so long as the hundred per minute are taken from the one and deposited in the other globe you are safe, but failure in this respect even once means that you forfeit the right to continue. If you succeed in emptying the one and filling the other globe on these conditions, the money is yours. But you understand that you win nothing unless you move the whole million. You may choose your own time for starting—nor later than Monday at noon—and if you wish the furnishings of the gymnasium altered in any way, you and your attendants are at liberty to do so. I allow none of my servants to enter here, and I need not remind you, gentlemen, that you have pledged yourselves not to breathe a word of this to anyone so long as I remain in this country. And, my dear Williams, if on second thoughts you would rather leave it alone, I will be charmed to have the society of yourself and friends so long as you and they care to stay."

"Nice sort of gymnasium," was Simpson's comment.

"You take care to keep your million safe," said Robertson. "Williams hasn't a look in."

"As to that he can judge for himself, and please himself whether he starts or not, and, if he starts, he can stop when he's had enough of it. And I may tell you that, not three months ago, a cyclist who goes in for long distance riding kept at it until he had shifted more than three quarters of a million. Poor devil! He was the gamest man I ever saw. He fell asleep at it when only a miserable 200,000 short, and lay like a log for hours. When he awoke, he wanted to balance one

"THE GYMNASIUM.

globe on top of the other, and carry both away on his head, and he's still in a state of semi-insanity. Another got through 700,000 before he collapsed, and I've been told that the sight of a sovereign even now drives him frantic. It's better sport a long way than horse-racing, or even prize fighting. I've been told that there's a bit of a crook in my nature, when I can gloat over the struggles of a man before the final collapse, and perhaps it is true. But you can think it over, Williams. There's one thing you may depend on, and that is a fair run for your money. You know the conditions you have to observe; and, on my part, if I interfere with you in any way whatever, the money shall be yours without you going on any further. You can appoint anyone here as referee in case of any question arising or any dispute, and his decision will bind us both." Thus spake Silas K. Trotter.

"I'll let you know in the course of an hour if I'll go on; if so, I would like Simpson and Parker to help me, if they will be so good. Suppose I retain them, and we appoint Duncan referee, and Hawkins and Robertson, on your behalf, can see that I go fair."

We were all willing.

An examination of the "gymnasium" revealed that the walls were sheathed with iron enamelled a bright white. It was brilliantly illuminated by acetylene gas from sixty-four jets, the whiteness of the flame of which harmonized with the walls. In addition to the bath room, a bedroom of only moderate dimensions, but beautifully furnished, formed an adjunct. The fountains and palms, the couches and easy chairs, with their rich coverings, were strange accompaniments to the most arduous athletic attempt of all time. The globes could be lowered or raised, as desired. The exact dimensions of the gymnasium were: Length, 46ft.; breadth, 32ft.; height, 10ft. From globe to globe the distance was 45 7/16ft.

When Simpson, Williams, and I had fully considered the project, we came to the same conclusion as Robertson, that the million

was not likely to change hands It was comforting of Trotter, too, to mention that the last man who had had designs on it was still semi-insane. However, we intimated to Trotter that we would like to have possession for three or four hours on the following day (Saturday) to make some slight alterations, and that on Monday morning, at ten o'clock, Williams would be ready to start.

The reason we chose that hour was that he might start fresh after a full night's sleep, and have his breakfast partly digested before the commencement of his long journey.

We had figured out the task set to each aspirant for wealth.

First: He had to move 100 sovereigns per minute; 6,000 sovereigns per hour; 142,800 sovereigns per working day of 23 hours and 48 minutes; 999,600 sovereigns per week.

The task would be completed in one week and four minutes.

Second: From globe to globe was 45½ft. He had to walk from the one to the other with his little load and back every minute. The walk works out as nearly as need be 30yds. per minute; 1 mile per hour; 24 miles per day; 168 miles per week.

Third, and least important: He had to carry eight tons of bullion in 10,000 instalments 15yds in one week.

Little wonder, I thought, if five days of it drove a man into an asylum.

Trotter was wise in his generation, but had slightly given himself away when he allowed any alteration to be made in the furnishing of the gymnasium. If I recollect aright, it was Simpson who spoke first about the dazzling whiteness of the walls, which was bound speedily to become very trying to the eyes. This had to be remedied. So he and I went off to London by the afternoon express, and while he was buying bamboo rods and fastenings, and a number of lengths of a cool green silk to drape the walls, I was investing in three-score of gas shades to tone the brightness of the light. When afterwards asked, Trotter readily admitted that the white enamelling of the walls was intended to act as an irritant to the nerves, and particularly the eyesight. He had no personal knowledge of optics, beyond having been informed that one of the most trying colours to the eyes was pure white, and he had found it so.

We returned with our purchases late at night, and the following day, in less than three hours, had draped the walls and fitted up the gas shades. The empty globe was lowered so that the chute running into it into which the pailfuls of gold were to be dropped was brought to about four feet from the ground. A strip of linoleum was laid down from globe to globe on the thick and yielding carpet. Changes of clothing and slippers were laid out in the bedroom, for Williams had declared for the latter in preference to boots or shoes.

"TROTTER SHOOK HANDS WITH HIM"

A chair was placed adjacent to the spigot, and, lastly, a table for refreshments was placed by the side of the full globe, and, so far as possible, our preparations were complete.

When we were finished, Trotter said: "I see you mean business. I guess that artistic draping of the walls will be worth eight hours to you. Good luck to you, and if you pull it off, Silas K. Trotter, of Chicago, will still have a few dollars left."

We took things easily for the rest of the day, arranged about food, and how Simpson and I were to share the labours of attendants and best assist. Sunday we spent quietly, and retired to our rooms about eleven o'clock.

Next morning, a little before ten, we were all assembled in the gymnasium waiting for Old Father Time. Williams was dressed in flannels, and wore light and easy-fitting slippers. Trotter shook hands with him,

wished him success, and said he had business in London which necessitated his leaving us within half an hour. But he hoped to see us all in the evening about ten o'clock, when the machinery would stop for six minutes. But really he took no interest in the performance until, at the earliest, the third day, as up till then the desire for gold would keep any man of even average physical ability awake. With that, he handed to the referee the key which released the spring and set the machinery in motion.

Exactly at ten Mr. Duncan released the spring, and the golden stream began to flow.

CHAPTER II.

It was a sight to be remembered! The moment the key was inserted, like a stream of molten gold, the sovereigns rushed from the spigot into the long and narrow pail. For a third of a minute the coins went clattering in; there was a slight click; the stream stopped; Williams lifted the pail, walked leisurely across the room, emptied it, returned as leisurely, fixed the pail in its old position, and sat down.

Another fifteen seconds, a slight click, and the yellow stream flowed once more. There was dead silence, save for the rattling of the coins as they dropped to the foot of the pail, followed by a duller clicking as it filled. Five times had it been filled and emptied when Simpson asked the referee if he would allow a pad of leather or india rubber to be put at the bottom of the pail, as the noise was rather annoying. It was apparently a trifling matter, but it was ten minutes before the reply, which was in the affirmative, was given.

Duncan had a judicial mind, and informed us that it was not without considerable hesitation that he had resolved to allow the alteration. He might be wrong, but he inclined to the opinion, and accordingly decided that it was a permissible alteration of the furnishing of the gymnasium as authorized by our host. His finding was therefore that his attendants might procure the pad, but that Williams must insert it himself. Trotter, who waited till the point was settled, said to me, as he was leaving, that he thought Duncan's decision quite fair, and that this was the first time that any aspirant for the million or his friends had seen through his little wiles, and taken measures to counteract them.

The bottom of the pail had been constructed as the duplicate on the other globe would show—so that the coins would make a peculiarly harsh sound in falling, which would jar on the nerves, and in time become a positive torture to listen to. In its way it was as trying as the dazzling glare of the walls. But even with our preventive measures we would find our man a physical wreck—assuming that he was the equal of the best of those who had gone before—at from five and a half to six days.

This was Trotter's opinion, but it was neither Simpson's nor mine. Williams might collapse through want of sleep before the seven days were up, but there would be no physical wreck—he wasn't built that way. In perfect health and condition, he had been in training for this peculiar event for six weeks. Without any exact knowledge of what the ordeal was to be, the training he had undergone had thoroughly fitted him for it. There was no question but that, apart from the points in his favour stated by Trotter, he was better prepared in every way than any of his forerunners. We, who were looking after him, knew exactly in what way we could be of assistance, and he himself knew how to reserve his forces to the uttermost. His splendid physical ability was aided by his excellent judgment.

His plans were laid as if he were a machine capable of performing a certain quantity of work and no more. Not one inch would he walk unnecessarily, not one unnecessary word would he speak. And so in silence he sauntered from globe to globe with his little load of gold, and back again to sit down and rest till another load was ready. There was no variation in his speed, each double journey occupying from twenty-five to twenty-six seconds. I made a pad of thick leather to fit the bottom of the pail and placed it on his chair. That was less than three-quarters of an hour from the start, and even so soon the rattling sound was becoming disagreeable and irritating. He promptly fixed it in position, and as the next little load rolled in with a melodious rumble, we felt that we had distinctly scored.

For the first hour not only Williams but the spectators were very silent. But the novelty of it soon wore off, we pulled some easy chairs together, made ourselves comfortable, and chatted away. The conversation, however, always came back to the same point, and that was the unanimous expression of the wish that Williams would scoop in Trotter's million. And we discussed the *pros* and *cons* of it from every point we could think of. As it wasn't necessary for us to live in the place for a week if Williams had to, we

arranged that either Simpson or myself should always be at hand on his behalf, and one of the other three to see that the interests of Silas K. were not neglected. At the expiry of two and a half hours Robertson and I were the only spectators. Half an hour later Williams lunched.

You can readily appreciate that the question of eating and drinking was of great importance, and it we had carefully gone into beforehand. If his digestion went seriously wrong it would greatly militate against Williams's chances, and the impossibility of having even a few minutes' rest after meals for a week on end would give the proverbial ostrich indigestion. The best way to get over this was for him to discard heavy food altogether, and to subsist on what was light, nourishing, and easily digested.

I have always taken a particular interest in cycling, and have watched with never failing interest the development of the pastime and the growth of the sport. I remember the days of the tall machine, when Cortis rode twenty miles in the hour, and the fame of it was wafted from Continent to Continent. Nowadays a second-rate professional rides his thirty miles in the same time Like Trotter, I have for years watched the performances of the long-distance riders, and have known the best of them personally. In a twenty four hours' race, the man who wins is in his saddle for at least twenty-three hours, and for nourishment while on their journey, the riders mainly take fruit, custards, beef-tea, etc., and very little, if any, alcohol There was a certain resemblance between a record ride from Land's End to John o' Groat's and the attempt under description So we resolved to take a leaf out of the long distance cyclist's book—at all events, for two or three days.

"A GOODLY CHOICE."

A goodly choice was there. Bunches of hothouse grapes, bananas peeled and ready, ripe and luscious pears and peaches Rice pudding and custards, stewed fruit of various kinds, and fresh eggs ready to be switched and served with port or milk. A box of Jones's Cuca Chocolate, and a chicken cooked to a turn and broken into small pieces , For liquid, Smith's Extract of Beef, plain beef-tea, milk and soda, and tea were all on the table. Except port, no alcohol was to be introduced till near the end, and then we were to be guided by circumstances as to its use or non-use Indeed, while Williams frequently had eggs and milk, the port was not once touched from start to finish

His lunch consisted of some fragments of chicken, three eggs switched with milk, and nearly a pound of grapes. It was a sight to see the grapes disappearing during the week, bunch after bunch came from Trotter's hothouses, and every morning another supply had to be brought in until it neared the end Williams had a regular meal at intervals of from three to four hours, and, as he felt inclined, he indulged in those lovely grapes. The table groaned with the good things I have mentioned, as well as minor delicacies, so there was plenty of choice, and he took whatever he fancied Looking back at it now, I am convinced that the selection of food was, in the circumstances, the best possible

The hours went slowly by, and, sentinel like, the regular march continued March, 25sec., rest, 35sec., march, 25sec., rest, 35sec.; and on, and on, and on.

Duncan, Hawkins, and Simpson came back about two o'clock, and were very little away for the remainder of the day. Simpson and I made up a little working time-table for the week, but we didn't observe it very carefully, as we spent nearly all our time in the gymnasium

For the night time we brought blankets from our rooms, and made ourselves comfortable on lounges, and if one slept the other kept watch and ward. The others slept in their rooms, but there was always one of them in the gymnasium to see that the conditions were faithfully observed. At a quarter to ten Trotter returned.

At ten o'clock precisely the machinery stopped, and in the six minutes at his dis-

posal Wilhams had a wash and sat down at the table for his fourth meal since the start I took the opportunity of pointing out to him that, if he felt it could be any relief, he might vary his resting time between the journeys a little From the replacing of the pail on the spigot till the refilling began there was always an interval of 15sec., and, if he cared, he could with safety add 10sec of the 15 to each alternate spell of resting and deduct it from the other, and make the little programme walk, 25sec., rest, 45sec., walk 25sec, rest 25sec He hadn't thought of it—it would be useful when feeding, and would break the monotony at other times, but he mustn't risk more than the 10sec

"Feeling very well and fit," he said, in reply to Trotter's inquiry, as he resumed his task

What need to describe at any length the succeeding day or two? The first night, with the object of resting his eyes as much as possible, he had closed his eyelids between journeys, and did so intermittently until Friday night, when he stopped it lest they should keep closed altogether.

We made a point of having a full meeting at every stoppage of the machinery, ten at night and ten in the morning, and Williams knew that, with one exception, our presence was the silent expression of our sympathy

Trotter was certainly scrupulously fair in his conduct. Save on the first evening, he never addressed Williams, and he did everything possible for his comfort. More than once he reminded us that whatever food or drink was wanted had only to be asked for The temperature was maintained at or about 60 degrees, and he asked us to make sure that it was quite satisfactory to Williams. There were no windows, but the air was always fresh, for the perfect ventilation was in keeping with the completeness of all the other arrangements. The outer door leading to the gymnasium was kept locked, but we each had a key Trotter himself kept the keys of the inner doors, but these were always left unlocked

What diabolical ingenuity that could have designed such a thing! The strong man, with his lust for gold, struggling on against the imperative claims of Nature, always hitherto with the same inevitable result! calculated with fiendish cunning to lure the man into the belief that he would win the gold, only to have it snatched from his hands when the prize was well nigh won'

And when from time to time there was a full gathering, Trotter graphically described the sufferings endured by Williams's forerunners. The jaunty way they commenced, the gradual subduing of their gaiety as the days passed by, and the final collapse. How he revelled in the recollection of their sufferings! It would be untrue to say that he was anything but a most kindly man, except in this Was it a touch of insanity, or what? It was so at variance with the rest of his nature For three days his visits were of short duration On Thursday, he rarely left us, and on Friday morning he carried in a couple of travelling rugs, and intimated that he was in till the finish.

He watched Williams carefully for an hour, timed his movements with his stop-watch, and turning to us, said, "There is more than brute force here; there is science, positively science It isn't a man, it's a machine, endowed with human intelligence Just see the automatic regularity of his walk, and the automatic closing of his eyes between the journeys to save them all he knows how. But," rubbing his hands, "the better the man, the keener the sport. He'll hang out for a day and a half yet—perhaps two days even, and then he'll fall asleep, or go mad, or both. He's the most lovely subject I've ever seen"

For four days he was, as Trotter put it, like an automatic machine, and outwardly as cool as if taking a quiet constitutional Still, the deadly, dreary monotony was telling its tale, and although we concealed it from the others, Simpson and I saw that he was becoming irritable and impatient He spoke rarely, but on Friday night (four and a half days gone), when we were with him in the bath room, he burst out with "This is the invention of the Evil One himself! But if I live I'll defeat him—only keep me awake. Do anything your wits can devise for it, but keep me awake" Twelve hours earlier we had renewed the leather in the pail It was worn through The linoleum from globe to globe was also showing signs of wear, and when Williams was resting we took it up and replaced it. At this time the globe he was emptying was appreciably less than half-full, something like 650,000 sovereigns having been transferred, and the machinery was still perfect in its regularity

For five days and nights Williams's very exceptional athletic ability and his splendid condition enabled him to stand the strain without it having very much apparent effect on him Unkempt and unshaven he was, but that was unavoidable, and it was not till Saturday morning, with two days to go, that what I might describe as the real struggle

began By this time, with one exception, he had beaten all previous performances. The two previous best were respectively 4 days 23 hours, and 5 days 9 hours 17 minutes, said Trotter, and he made a practice where the actor gave a good show to give a consolation prize of £250 for doing better than four days and a half; £250 for each twelve hours beyond that; and an extra £250 for improving on the previous best. He left it to Simpson and myself to tell Williams of this or not As a matter of fact, we didn't

When having his morning wash, Williams said his eyes were giving out; that the mere muscular exertion was nothing, if he didn't fall asleep. He washed his hands but not his face, and had very little breakfast Impatient to start again, when the globe began once more to disgorge its diminishing contents, in place of his steady, mechanical walk, his pace was faster and very irregular, and between the journeys he leant against the table or roamed about the room Then he complained of the stifling atmosphere, and in ten minutes Trotter had reduced the temperature to 48deg. Soon he asserted that it was colder than Siberia, and insisted on having his fur lined overcoat, so the temperature was again raised to about sixty. Trotter gleefully rubbed his hands, for it was the beginning of the end. His vagaries continued till about one o'clock, when he pulled himself together, and right on till his next resting stage he gave us no cause for anxiety

"HE INSISTED ON HAVING HIS FUR LINED OVERCOAT"

There was a little diversion when, at seventeen minutes past seven, our host gave out that Williams had improved on all previous performances. We applauded slightly. Williams paid no attention, but when ten o'clock came he asked what the noise had been about He was feeling fitter then than in the morning, but anticipated that he might go a bit wrong during the night, and might want some hot coffee—very strong—or champagne. But we were only to give him these if he was very bad, as stimulants must only be resorted to in dire necessity, and avoided altogether if possible. Not the slightest trace of mental aberration was there. He was tired and sleepy—very sleepy—that was all But we all know that often a man is strongest before the collapse, and Williams knew it as well as any of us The soles of a second pair of shippers were worn through, and for a change he put on a comfortable pair of shoes For supper he was content with a long draught of weak beef-tea and a dish of custard

Thirty six hours only to go; a click, and the machinery was in motion for another round of the clock The spectators had supper together, and but for the time employed in bringing in provisions for Williams and ourselves, we all waited right through till the finish. From this right on, Trotter scarcely spoke; he never slept, ate very little, and concentrated all his attention on the man who was going for his million Nor did Simpson and I sleep all that night or the next

Duncan, with the weight of the responsibility of his position as referee on his shoulders, made a strenuous endeavour to follow our example, but dozed off now and again, while Robertson and Hawkins slept at intervals. After midnight Williams tired perceptibly, and again became erratic in the duration of his journeys He struggled on till a quarter to four He was dragging badly as he walked from globe to globe; his pace had degenerated into a crawl of less than two miles an hour, and again and again he hung up the pail with a very few seconds to spare. Falling asleep as he walked, unless there was a change, it must soon be over. It was the worst time for him of the twenty-four hours,

and if he could only get through another hour, he might be right for another day, and then, so near the end, surely, if his legs would do their part, we could keep him awake somehow or other.

Side by side, Simpson and I walked with him and shouted at him to keep him going. We dosed him with hot tea and coffee, and still he kept blinking his eyes, leaving the linoleum track for the carpet, and by a species of instinct returning to it. We gave him one glass of champagne, and even that we hesitated to use so soon, and for the same reason we gave him no brandy.

At half-past four there was no change, and Trotter was profoundly satisfied with the way things were shaping, and a huge grin irradiated his face from ear to ear.

Simpson shouted to him: "Get on, Williams. Trotter's grinning all over at you. He thinks you're done for. Look at him."

The change was electrical. What the coffee and the champagne had failed to do, the mere idea of being ridiculed accomplished, and the situation *pro tem* was saved. He pulled himself together, helped himself to some grapes, and, as he went along, renewed his strength.

Trotter had anticipated, and he was judging from past experiences, that towards the end Williams might become temporarily insane. The only occasions on which his mind wandered a little were when the incident about the temperature occurred, and once on the last day; and with these exceptions, while physically exhausted, and his eyes closing in spite of everything, his mental faculties were thoroughly clear.

My explanation of this is that he was of higher intelligence and more highly educated than those who had made the attempt—and failed—before him, and that their physical endowments had been improved at the expense of their mental, and that this accounted for Trotter's miscalculation. He was very much surprised when, at seven o'clock, Williams indulged in an early fruit breakfast, and, his lassitude and weariness gone, at ten o'clock wished us all a cheery "Good morning."

He had a good wash, kicked off the shoes, as he preferred slippers, said he hoped to go all right till night when he expected to have a great deal worse time of it than last night even, and that whatever heroic method it might be necessary to adopt to keep him awake, not to hesitate.

CHAPTER III.

And so the penultimate stage was entered upon—only twenty-four hours to go. And here we were treated to the most surprising display of this strange and weird performance. He looked far from well, but till the next six minutes' pause of the machinery, Williams performed his task with apparent ease. He went through this twelve hours' spell without halt or stumble. But at the end of it he would neither sit down nor eat. He was in reality about cleaned out, and expected that his next bad turn would finish him off. It would have been a healthier look-out if he had felt worse in the earlier part of the day. It was Trotter's leering face that had kept him going for the last hour. With some persuasion he took a small quantity of the beef-tea and ate a cake of cuca chocolate before the click of the machinery sounded.

Twelve hours to go, and the last act of the drama was commenced. There in the silent seclusion of an English country house the grim and desperate struggle went on; and the greatest prize ever offered to athlete since the world began was at stake.

Tall and gaunt, his cheeks thin and sunken, eyes bloodshot, face haggard and unshaven, but with stern determination imprinted on it, Williams resumed his part. The ghastliness of his features was accentuated by the light from the acetylene gas, and his clothes hung loose on his body, as if made for a larger man.

There was no thought of sleep now with any of us. Williams went well till two o'clock. He picked up a grape now and then, but looked neither to right nor left. The one globe was nearly empty, and the other was so full of sovereigns that it seemed as if the addition of a few hundreds would cause it to overflow.

The time dragged slowly on. At 2.30 he asked for the temperature to be reduced, and said to me: "I'm afraid, old chap, I'm sewn up. I feel it coming on, but keep me at it if you can. When my eyes close, one of these times, it'll be for good, as I haven't muscular power left to open them. My legs are all right, but I can't keep my eyelids from closing. I'm half blind now, and the time will never pass. The minutes are like hours, and the hours stretch into weeks, and the gymnasium seems miles across."

I comforted him the best way I could, told him that if he could get over the next two hours, he'd be all right. See how fresh he got after four o'clock the other mornings. No, he would have nothing to drink just

then. Still he persevered, and another half-hour went by on leaden wings

An anxious look began to show itself on Trotter's face. I offered to compound for half a million

"No, thanks; I guess it's all or nothing at this racket," said he, "and I'd lose my fun if I accepted Say, I'll bet you ten thousand dollars he doesn't last two hours from now"

I wasn't betting. I was merely aiding and abetting. And even as we talked Williams stumbled. Four of the golden coins fell out of the pail, went rolling over the linoleum and on to the carpet. Our hearts were in our mouths as he picked up the sovereigns, put them in the pail, emptied it, and actually sprinted back.

You will remember that it was a condition that each load had to be emptied into the globe before the pail was refilled. It took him a long time to find the last of the coins in the thick carpeting. But still he was back in time to catch the first of the next load of sovereigns as it dropped from the tap, but with not so much as one second to spare The shock of the narrow escape revived him for a little. Then he got a towel from the bath-room, and between two of his journeys bathed his face and hands in the basin of one of the fountains

Three-thirty now Only six hours and a half to go! We had at hand brandy and soda, champagne, hot tea and coffee, and as a fanciful experiment, if by the aid of these we couldn't keep him alive to his work, a mixture of snuff and cayenne pepper An unholy commixtion! How ready he was to drop, and with what indomitable pluck he struggled on

Say what you will—it is the inherent love of physical prowess in every shape and form implanted for centuries in every true Briton's heart that has enabled our little island to lead the world And think ye, was it only the sordid love of gain that made a man undergo such physical distress?

"I'LL BET YOU TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS HE DOESN'T LAST TWO HOURS."

That was the least part of it It was the desire to excel his fellows, and make possible the impossible. Before I am done you will see And Williams was still plodding on, but in dire distress. Simpson and I now accompanied him, one at either side, never touching, but shouting and bawling at him to keep him at his nauseous task. Slowly he shuffled over the linoleum track and back. Three times within the next half-hour he got back on the very verge of time to the spigot. His mouth was parched, but for long he refused to drink — what could be done?

We beguiled him into having a pinch of snuff The horrid mixture nearly suffocated him and roused him from his apathy With eyes and mouth smarting he gulped down a tumbler of champagne, and another. He grew a little livelier, another glass of champagne, and as on the previous morning, he came round And now, as we fondly hoped, the last crisis was passed. Our hopes ran high as he ate a banana and more grapes and kept steadily on his journey. It was more a shuffle than a walk, but there was life in it and in his movements

Time passed more rapidly. At six o'clock Trotter came to me, and said "You can offer Williams to compound for half a million now, if you like."

"No, thanks," said I, "as you say, it's all or nothing at this racket You've had your fun, and you're going to pay for it" I regretted my hastiness before ten o'clock

Seven o'clock passed, eight o'clock, and nine o'clock, and the gold was as good as won A mere handful remained. Only sixty-four minutes now, and Williams a millionaire!

"No, fifty-eight minutes only," said Simpson, "we were six minutes wrong in our first calculation There is only one rest in the last twenty four hours' work—not two. The task will be completed at 9 58—one week less two minutes from the start" He

was right. "Fifty seven to go, Williams; fifty six to go, Williams!"

But Williams was going wrong again. We dosed him with tea and coffee and brandy. His sight was fast giving out. His left eye was closed, and his right was little better.

We were—everybody except Williams—mad with excitement. He hadn't enough energy left to have any feeling whatever. Forty-five minutes only, and a million pounds at stake!

How the minutes lagged! If only the mechanism of the globe would fail to do its part! Our hearts were beating fast. Trotter's face was tense and livid.

"For Heaven's sake, end it now," said Simpson, "and cry quits at half a million."

"Not now," said Trotter, sternly; "all or nothing."

"Forty to go, only forty to go." But Williams laughed mirthlessly. "Ha, ha! I'm going crazy, and the Yank will keep his gold." And yet he accomplished one more journey in time. "What beautiful golden serpents are crawling about. What a pretty present one of them will make for my little sweetheart," he murmured.

"Never mind them," shouted Simpson, "they'll all be yours in half an hour. Keep awake, man!" And mechanically a few more journeys were covered. But a total collapse seemed imminent. One eye useless, the other almost, as a last resort we moved the shades off the gas jets, and the shock to the optic nerves caused by the exceeding brilliancy of the light had a welcome effect on his sight for a little.

Thirty to go, and he wanted to water the palms with gold from his pail, and was dissuaded in the very nick of time. The tension was becoming unbearable. Poor Williams's mind was unhinged for the time; he babbled nursery rhymes and sang snatches of songs, and yet, as if actuated by Providence, with many a halt and stumble, he still struggled on. Twenty-two to go, and he rushed to the nearest fountain and took a long draught of the pure water. To our intense surprise it cleared his muddled brain, and our anxiety about his mental condition was relieved.

Surely the wheels of Time were trebly clogged and dragged. And, oh! the suspense as we kept him company in the journeys as it neared the end! Twelve to go, his one serviceable eye closed, and he reeled with sleep. We dosed him with brandy and implored him to keep at it with eyes shut.

"FORTY TO GO!"

The end was very near, and, believe me, like a blind man he felt his way across the linoleum track and back eleven weary times, and put up his pail for the last load.

Now and then throughout the week an extra coin had got through, and the last was a very small pailful. Pulling himself together for a final effort, he walked straight across the pathway, emptied it, returned, hung the pail up on the spigot of the now empty globe, and the game was played out, the prize was won!

And cheer after cheer from five lusty British throats reverberated within the walls of the most curious gymnasium eye ever saw. But they fell on deaf ears. Trotter had gone off in a dead faint when he saw the impossible made possible; and the hero, his task completed, had calmly gone to sleep leaning against the empty globe. We carried him into the bedroom, partly undressed him, and laid him on the bed.

Williams fell asleep at ten o'clock on Monday morning. After an uninterrupted sleep of thirty-one hours he awoke on Tuesday afternoon in time for dinner. When he had had a bath and a shave, which was a very serious business with a nine days' growth of healthy stubble to get rid of, he looked quite a respectable member of society,

although his face was still thin and drawn out. Needless to speak of the warmth and sincerity of our congratulations—that goes without saying

After the slops he had been feeding on for the past week, and his long fast, he was very hungry and did amplest justice to the fare

Trotter took his loss like the good sportsman he was, and amused us by his practical way of analyzing the performance The draping of the walls and subduing of the light was value for eight hours, the padding of the pail five hours, and the way Williams had husbanded every ounce of strength, instead of larking about at first like those who had tried before, was worth another four or five hours; but a day had gone wrong somewhere, and he couldn't make it out He ought to have collapsed at six days. Indeed, after dinner he made a speech, in which he referred most handsomely to Williams in particular, and the rest of us in general, detailed to us his analysis of the performance, and ended by handing to our friend the keys of the gymnasium Here Williams did a very foolish thing He wanted Trotter to keep his million, as he had made the trial for sport and not for gain, and to satisfy Trotter that it could be done He was doubtful if he remained an amateur, or had become a professional according to the rules of the governing athletic bodies

"No, no," said Trotter, "I have still twenty million dollars left, and the money is yours fairly and honestly earned; and if you won't take it, nobody else will, for I will have it sunk in the middle of the Atlantic It has been a good lesson to me, for it was the most cruel piece of work that could be given to man. I only hope you will suffer no harm from the strain put on you, and that you may have health and strength to benefit by the money."

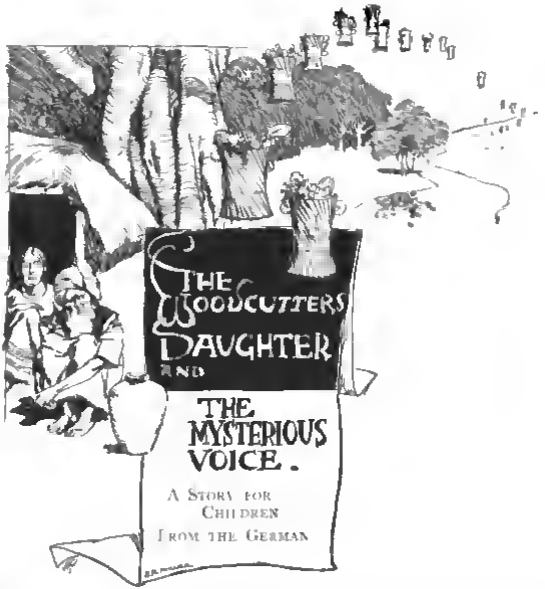
So Williams's scruples were over-ruled, and the Amateur Athletic Association and the National Cyclists' Union have not been asked if he is now an amateur or a professional, and as his racing days are done, it is inconsequential

During the trial he lost seventeen pounds in weight, but made it all up in ten days. He was very sleepy-headed for a week or two —went to bed early at nights and was lazy in the mornings—but there was absolutely no after ill-effect But if you ask him, he will tell you that he would never be tempted again — not for one hundred millions — to go through the last twelve hours of the struggle

The party broke up in a day or two, Williams remaining with Trotter to see as to the removal of his eight tons of bullion Space will not permit of my telling you of the trouble there was in getting it disposed of Eventually it was transferred to London, and is now safely invested in Consols, so-called gilt-edged securities, and hereditable property (real estate) And, strange turn of Fortune's wheel, Williams's latest investment was the purchase of Trotter's estate in Longshire.

For the American had fallen on evil times. The inactive life of a man of leisure soon palled on him He shut up his country mansion and went to London, and through sheer want of something to do, took to speculating on the Stock Exchange. In America if he had touched dross it would have turned into gold; here it was the converse And through his absence from America, his investments there played a merry accompaniment to his Lombard Street frivols

In April last his princely fortune was exhausted, and it was only through Williams paying a fancy price for his Longshire estate that he was enabled to return to America with £20,000 in his pocket to start life afresh And with his departure from our shores the embargo on my pen is released, and I am enabled to describe, in however feeble fashion, the grandest feat of endurance ever accomplished



IN an Eastern land lived a wood-cutter who was so poor he had not even an axe, and was obliged with his wife and daughter to gather the old wood they found lying about. If they obtained sufficient to purchase food for the day, they rejoiced over their frugal fare; but this did not often happen, and their compulsory fasts became so frequent that they languished with hunger. To Nur-Singh and his wife poverty was doubly bitter on account of their daughter. She was of a marriageable age, but who would wed one so poor?

Tulissa, a beautiful maiden, was not without ambition, and often beguiled the weary hours with dreams of future greatness. She would imagine herself a princess, and, in picturing a luxurious life, forget for a time the misery of her present lot. But these dreams were too often interrupted by the necessity of seeking wood in the forest. These wanderings brought her one day to a ruined well, overgrown with grass, around which lay a quantity of wood. She had gathered a large bundle, when she heard a voice, apparently from out the well, calling her name. She turned and listened; no one appeared, yet she distinctly heard the words —

"Will you be my wife?"

Terrified, she seized her bundle and fled, resolved never again to visit that haunted spot. But the good price she received for her wood pleased her, and when their last coin was spent, and no wood could be found in all the country round, she again sought the well. The wood lying in greater quantities than on her former visit induced her to approach close to the dreaded place. She quickly collected the sticks, hoping to depart undisturbed, when again came the words: "Will you be my wife?" and, more terrified than before, she took to flight, never stopping until she reached her home. Here

want soon again pressed heavily; her parents sought in vain for wood, and urged Tulissa to try her luck; thereupon she told of the voice that had so alarmed her. Her parents did not consider it so terrible; indeed, they bade her re visit the well, and, if she again heard the voice, refer the unknown suitor to her father.

Tulissa went unwillingly, and was departing with her bundle, when again came that terrible question: "Will you be my wife?"

Summoning all her courage, she replied: "That proposal should be addressed to my father."

"Send your father here," sounded the voice.

Glad to escape so easily, Tulissa returned, and told what had occurred. Her father set forth immediately, and to his surprise found the path without trouble. He had not waited long, when from out the depths came the words: "You are poor and wretched; give me your daughter, and you shall be rich and happy; you shall have the finest clothes and daintiest food, your shadow shall grow and your riches increase, for I will gratify your every wish."

Blinded by these dazzling promises, Nur-Singh immediately consented, the wedding day was fixed, and the wood-cutter returned well pleased. The women were disappointed that he came empty handed, they were ashamed to appear in ragged garments on a festal occasion.

A few days before the wedding, the family were astonished to see a hundred baskets travelling through the air. They descended before the hut. Some were filled with choice fruits and confectionery, others contained shawls and every requisite for the female toilet, whilst the whole, in true Oriental fashion, was illuminated with coloured lamps. This filled all hearts with joy.

The appointed time found them at the well, but to their surprise there were no preparations for a wedding. At length the wood-cutter exclaimed: "How can I marry my daughter when no one is here to receive her?"

"We are all here," cried the voice; "place the ring on your daughter's finger, and she is mine." The same moment a ring made its appearance.

The wood-cutter obeyed; then, turning round, he saw a tent in which a rich banquet was spread. The three seated themselves to enjoy the sumptuous repast. As they finished, a beautiful sedan-chair approached them. Now for the first time they felt uneasy, and on seating herself in the chair the bride drew aside the curtains to take one last look at her relatives. Away sped the chair, followed by

"AWAY SPED THE CHAIR"

the anxious parents, and passing through a deep ravine reached an open plain. In the centre stood a magnificent palace, surrounded by a high wall with an iron door, through which the chair disappeared. Satisfied that the bridegroom had fulfilled his promise, they then returned home.

Henceforth they had riches in abundance and no longer needed to work. The neighbours, who before had never troubled about them, now visited them, inquiring eagerly about the change in their fortunes. As Nur Singh refused to gratify their curiosity they grew envious, went to the King, and entreated him to compel the wood-cutter to reveal the secret of his wealth. The King summoned Nur Singh and questioned him closely. The wood-cutter told how he had married his daughter, and the benefits he had received thereby. But the King, not believing his story, ordered him to be hanged. Now that death stared him in the face the unhappy wood-cutter began to doubt the wisdom of marrying his daughter to a person of whom he knew nothing, and bitterly he lamented his wretched fate.

The evening before the execution a voice said to the King: "Oh, King, harm not the poor wood-cutter. He has not deceived you; I married his daughter, and terribly will I avenge any injury done him."

The King replied: "One day I will spare him to see if you really possess your boasted power, then he must die, for I will not be turned from my purpose by empty threats."

Next morning when the King arose he and the wood cutter were the only persons living in the town; the inhabitants lay dead, bitten by snakes. The King now saw he had to do with a powerful spirit, so hastening to the prison he entreated Nur Singh to use his influence with his son-in-law to turn aside his wrath. The wood cutter willingly agreed, and although uncertain if his prayer would reach the ear of him to whom it was addressed, besought the spirit to restore the inhabitants to life. Immediately a rushing noise was heard, and the voice cried —

"Snakes, who obeyed my commands, and who alone know how to cure the poison of your bite, recall these men from the shadow of death."

The snakes obeyed, the inhabitants lived again; the King with his own hands struck off the wood-cutter's fetters, and sent him away loaded with presents.

Tulissa meanwhile lived happily with her husband, whom she only saw at night—he was away all day. He gave her costly presents, and only required that she should never leave the palace nor suffer any stranger to enter. And this beautiful abode contained all the heart could desire: there were gardens full of fruit trees, marble baths inlaid with agate and jasper, and numberless attendants who, to amuse her, played their lutes or related wonderful stories. But Tulissa soon wearied of this luxury, and would willingly have given all her jewels for a wreath of jasmine such as she used to twine in the old days at home.

One morning an old woman came to the palace selling cowries, the porter refused her admittance, but, unfortunately, she espied Tulissa looking out of a turret window. She addressed her in flattering terms, promising wonders if she might only approach, and her listener was soon induced to let down a sheet, up which the stranger rapidly climbed. Seating herself at the edge of the carpet she conversed pleasantly, told Tulissa many things, and asked her many questions. At length she said —

"Daughter, you say your husband is kind, does he eat with you, does he take food from your plate?"

"No," replied Tulissa, "he never does me that honour."

"You should require it of him," said the stranger, "if he refuses, be sure he does not properly esteem you."

Saying this she departed.

Left alone, Tulissa felt restless and unhappy. She repeated again and again what she should say to her husband, for she had resolved to follow the stranger's advice. So she left her supper untasted, and when he entered flew towards him begging him so earnestly to sup with her that he consented. Yet he did not seem pleased, and on leaving gave yet stricter orders to admit no one to the palace.

Time passed, and Tulissa had almost forgotten the incident, when one day looking from her window she saw an old woman selling antimony. She called her, let down the sheet, and admitted the stranger. After many compliments, the woman asked the same question as the first stranger. Tulissa replied proudly that he had done her that honour. The old woman then asked had he ever chewed betel nut and given it to her, and on her replying, "Never," persuaded her to demand this token of esteem.

That evening Tulissa asked her husband: "Why do you never give me betel nut from your mouth, as husbands do who love their wives?"

"Speak not thus," exclaimed the spirit; "ask not what will separate us for ever."

Tulissa tried persuasions, but finding them useless, relinquished her plan for the present. It is probable she would have abandoned it altogether, had not the old woman again visited her, asked had her husband ever told her his name, and persuaded her to require it as proof of his affection.

The same evening Tulissa made her request. In vain her husband strove to show her the foolishness of her wish. At length, losing patience, he said —

"If I tell you, it will be fatal to your happiness. I shall be compelled to part from you, and you will have to return to your former poverty."

Despite the warning, Tulissa persisted in her desire, until, finding all entreaties vain, her husband said —

"Well, so be it, but not here," and led her from the palace. Arrived at the banks of a river he stopped, asking, anxiously: "Are you still determined? There is yet time to withdraw your request."

Urged by irresistible curiosity, and regardless of consequences, Tulissa replied: "I will know."

"TULISSA MADE HER REQUEST."

The spirit walked into the water up to his knees, and then repeated his question, entreating her to abandon her wish. Tulissa refused, but even whilst she spoke he sank deeper in the stream, until only his head and shoulders were visible. A third time he repeated his question, assuring her of his love and entreating her tenderly to relinquish a wish which, if granted, she would repent to the last hour of her life. When, however, Tulissa again replied, "I will know," he cried, sorrowfully, "My name is Basnak Dan!" The same moment a serpent's head appeared above the water, shot a withering glance at the obstinate wife, and then sank in the stream, in which her husband had already disappeared.

Tulissa was now alone, and wearing the ragged clothes of bygone days. Vainly she sought her beautiful palace. Every path she took led to the old, ruined hut, and how ruined and squalid did it now appear! Within sat her parents, poor and hungry as of yore. The old life began again, but now it was embittered by her parents' reproaches, and regret for her ingratitude to her husband.

One day as she pursued her weary way a squirrel crossed her path. These little animals were so common she would not have noticed him, had not his white stripes reminded her of a squirrel whose life she had saved in the palace garden. Satisfied at having attracted her attention, the animal bounded before her to a place where lay abundance of wood. It was a lovely spot, and after collecting her bundle she sat down and fell asleep. A soft whispering awoke her, and looking round she saw two squirrels engaged in earnest conversation.

"Alas," said one, "how is it that our enemy has grown so powerful? I left our tribe free, I return to find them enduring a miserable slavery."

"It is," replied the other, "because Sarkasukis has obtained a confederate in the

mother of Basnak Dan, King of the Serpents. She discovered that her son had wedded a daughter of earth, and knew that if, through her ambassadors, she persuaded his wife to ask his name, she would regain all the power she lost when he succeeded to his father's kingdom. Sarkasukis told of the marriage, and persuaded the wife to ask the foolish question. The Queen mother now reigns supreme; Basnak Dan is as good as dead, and our persecutor is able to torment us at will."

Then a third squirrel spoke —

"Poor Tulissa, she once saved me from the vengeance of Sarkasukis. Is there no way in which she can regain her lost happiness?"

"There is," said the first speaker, "but it is very dangerous. She must journey eastwards until she reaches a river. This she must cross, but there is no boat, and the river is full of snakes who will kill her if she attempts to swim. After crossing she must seek the humas nest, should she find this, and an egg inside it, she must place the egg in her bosom to hatch. Next she must seek service with the Queen mother, who will set her many tasks, should she fail to perform them she will be destroyed by snakes. I know not if the egg will preserve her from danger, but when the bird is hatched it will peck out the eyes of the green serpent that always encircles the Queen's neck. Basnak Dan will then regain his kingdom and be reconciled to his wife, who, as the huma bestows royal rank on its possessor, will be herself a Queen."

Tulissa listened eagerly, and only hesitated about leaving her parents, but the sight of some gold pieces that suddenly appeared at her side, and that she rightly guessed to be a gift from her friend the squirrel, removed her fears.

Hastening home, she gave her mother the money and started on her journey. After wandering many days, she reached a broad and deep river, apparently full of horrible black snakes.

SHE REACHED THE RIVER FULL OF HORRIBLE BLACK SNAKES.

Here Tulissa made a raft of some reeds growing on the bank, and on this, accompanied by the squirrels who had guided her on her journey, reached the opposite shore in safety.

On landing, the squirrels led her to a deep glen, where stood a tree that glittered like an emerald. Beneath it were the humas singing and building their nest, their

beauteous plumage resplendent with golden light.

A few days later the wife laid an egg, but not liking to take their only treasure, Tulissa waited until the nest was full, then, taking one, she laid it in her bosom and followed the squirrels to the Queen's palace. Here she knocked and asked leave to enter the Queen's service. The attendants led her to their mistress. Although of rare beauty, there was something terrible in her appearance as she reclined among soft cushions, the green snake around her neck, for her eyes shone like the snake's eyes, and her long tresses fell in snake-like coils.

After gazing at Tulissa, she said:—

"I never engage servants without first proving their capability. If they fear the trial they can depart, but should they decide to try, nothing serves as an excuse for failure; if they fail, a terrible death awaits them."

Without hesitation Tulissa offered herself for trial. A crystal vase was then handed her; she was led into a courtyard surrounded by high walls, and bidden collect the perfume from a thousand flowers. No tree, root, or plant could be seen, and Tulissa would have despaired had she not relied on the squirrels' aid. She was looking for them when a swarm of bees flew over the wall, each carrying a bag of perfume, which they dropped into the vase.

As the delightful perfume filled the air, joyful cries resounded on all sides, the door of the courtyard opened, and Tulissa laid the vase at the feet of the Queen, whose stern glance softened as she inhaled the sweet perfume.

Next day she received a jug of grain, with the command to prepare therefrom a chaplet of precious stones. Now the squirrels helped her. They came in great numbers, each took a grain from the jug and replaced it by a stone of great price. With these Tulissa soon accomplished her task and presented it to the Queen, whose delight knew no bounds.

Returning to her room she found the little squirrel, who, apparently much distressed, led her to the forest, where the other squirrels awaited her. Here she learned that the terrible Sarkasukis was approaching, that to prevent his entering the palace she must burn certain herbs, but that this would also prevent the squirrels approaching, and, alas! several days must elapse ere the huma's egg would be hatched.

In sorrow Tulissa burned the herbs, and anxiously waited till the huma emerged from its shell. Then, hiding it in her bosom, she sought the Queen's chamber, where the bird flew forth and pecked out the eyes of the terrible green snake, whose magic power had wrought so much evil.

The Queen uttered a piercing cry, the castle rocked, Sarkasukis fell through the ceiling loaded with chains, while legions of genii, squirrels, and serpents led in their rightful monarch, Basnak Dan. Tulissa's garments changed to queenly raiment, the huma placed a glittering crown on her forehead, and she was now a fitting bride for a mighty spirit.

Great was the joy of the good spirits at the fall of Sarkasukis and the wicked Queen, but none rejoiced more than Nur-Singh and his wife, who on Basnak Dan's return to power were raised again from poverty to wealth.

The Thames Valley Catastrophe

By Grant Allen.

It can scarcely be necessary for me to mention, I suppose, at this time of day, that I was one of the earliest and fullest observers of the sad series of events which finally brought about the transference of the seat of Government of these islands from London to Manchester. Nor need I allude here to the conspicuous position which my narrative naturally occupies in the Blue-book on the Thames Valley Catastrophe (vol. ii., part vii.), ordered by Parliament in its preliminary Session under the new *régime* at Birmingham. But I think it also incumbent upon me, for the benefit of posterity, to supplement that necessarily dry and formal statement by a more circumstantial account of my personal adventures during the terrible period.

I am aware, of course, that my poor little story can possess little interest for our contemporaries, wearied out as they are with details of the disaster, and surfeited with tedious scientific discussions as to its origin and nature. But in after years, I venture to believe, when the crowning calamity of the nineteenth century has grown picturesque and, so to speak, ivy-clad, by reason of its remoteness (like the Great Plague or the Great Fire of London with ourselves), the world may possibly desire to hear how this unparalleled convulsion affected the feelings and fortunes of a single family in the middle rank of life, and in a part of London neither squalid nor fashionable.

It is such personal touches of human nature that give reality to history, which without them must become, as a great writer has finely said, nothing more than an old almanac. I shall not apologize, therefore, for being frankly egoistic and domestic in my reminiscences of that appalling day—for I know that those who desire to seek scientific information on the subject will look for it, not in vain, in the eight bulky volumes of the recent Blue-book. I shall concern myself here with the great event merely as it appeared to myself, a Government servant of the second grade, and in its relations to my own wife, my home, and my children.

On the morning of the 21st of August, in the memorable year of the calamity, I happened to be at Cookham, a pleasant and pretty village which then occupied the western bank of the Thames just below the spot where the Look-out Tower of the Earthquake and Eruption Department now dominates the whole wide plain of the Glassy Rock Desert. In place of the black lake of basalt which young people see nowadays winding its solid bays in and out among the grassy downs, most men still living can well remember a gracious and smiling valley, threaded in the midst by a beautiful river.

I had cycled down from London the evening before (thus forestalling my holiday),

and had spent the night at a tolerable inn in the village. By a curious coincidence, the only other visitor at the little hotel that night was a fellow cyclist, an American, George W. Ward by name, who had come over with his "wheel," as he called it, for six weeks in England, in order to investigate the geology of our southern counties for himself, and to compare it with that of the far western cretaceous system. I venture to describe this as a curious coincidence, because, as it happened, the mere accident of my meeting him gave me my first inkling of the very existence of that singular phenomenon of which we were all so soon to receive a startling example. I had never so much as heard before of fissure-eruptions; and if I had not heard of them from Ward that evening, I might not have recognised at sight the actuality when it first appeared, and therefore I might have been involved in the general disaster. In which case, of course, this unpretentious narrative would never have been written.

As we sat in the little parlour of the White Hart, however, over our evening pipe, it chanced that the American, who was a pleasant, conversable fellow, began talking to me of his reasons for visiting England. I was at that time a clerk in the General Post Office (of which I am now secretary), and was then no student of science; but his enthusiastic talk about his own country and its vastness amused and interested me. He had been employed for some years on the Geological Survey in the Western States, and he was deeply impressed by the solemnity and the colossal scale of everything American. "Mountains!" he said, when I spoke of Scotland, "why, for mountains, your Alps aren't in it,* and as for volcanoes, your Vesuviuses and Etnas just spit fire a bit at infrequent intervals, while ours do things on a scale worthy of a great country, I can tell you. Europe is a circumstance; America is a continent."

"But surely," I objected, "that was a pretty fair eruption that destroyed Pompeii!"

The American rose and surveyed me slowly. I can see him to this day, with his close shaven face and his contemptuous smile at my European ignorance. "Well," he said, after a long and impressive pause, "the lava flood that destroyed a few acres about the Bay of Naples was what we call a trickle. It came from a crater, and the crater it came from was nothing more than a small round vent-hole; the lava flowed down from it in a moderate stream over a limited area. But what do you say to the earth opening in a huge crack, forty or fifty miles long—say, as far as from here right away to London, or farther—and lava pouring out from the orifice, not in a little rivulet as at Etna or Vesuvius, but in a sea or inundation, which spread at once over a tract as big as England? That's something like volcanic action, isn't it? And *that's* the sort of thing we have out in Colorado."

"You are joking," I replied, "or bragging. You are trying to astonish me with the familiar spread eagle."

He smiled a quiet smile. "Not a bit of it," he answered. "What I tell you is at least as true as Gospel. The earth yawns in Montana. There are fissure-eruptions, as we call them, in the Western States, out of which the lava has welled like wine out of a broken skin—welled up in vast roaring floods, molten torrents of basalt, many miles across, and spread like water over whole plains and valleys."

"Not within historical times?" I exclaimed.

"I'm not so sure about that," he answered, musing. "I grant you, not within times which are historical right there—for Colorado is a very new country: but I incline to think some of the most recent fissure eruptions took place not later than when the Tudors reigned in England. The lava oozed out, red-hot — gushed out — was squeezed out—and spread instantly everywhere; it's so comparatively recent that the surface of the rock is still bare in many parts, unweathered sufficiently to support vegetation. I fancy the stream must have been ejected at a single burst, in a huge white-hot dome, and then flowed down on every side, filling up the valleys to a certain level, in and out among the hills, exactly as water might do. And some of these eruptions, I tell you, by measured survey, would have covered more ground than from Dover to Liverpool, and from York to Cornwall."

"Let us be thankful," I said, carelessly, "that such things don't happen in our own times."

He eyed me curiously. "*Haven't* happened, you mean," he answered. "We have no security that they mayn't happen again to-morrow. These fissure-eruptions, though not historically described for us, are common events in geological history—commoner and on a larger scale in America than elsewhere. Still, they have occurred in all lands and at various epochs; there is no reason at all

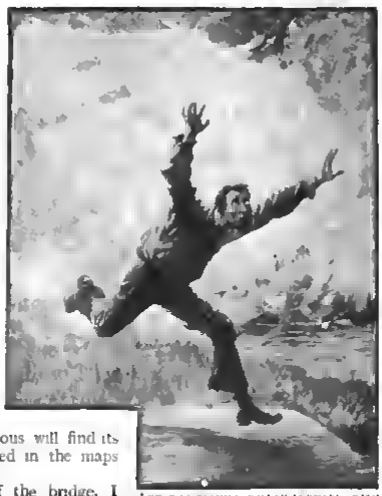
*A slang phrase of the time, equivalent to our modern "Your Alps aren't the show," or "fail to eventuate."

why one shouldn't occur in England at present."

I laughed, and shook my head I had the Englishman's firm conviction—so rudely shattered by the subsequent events, but then so universal — that nothing very unusual ever happened in England

Next morning I rose early, bathed in Odney Weir (a picturesque pool close by), breakfasted with the American, and then wrote a hasty line to my wife, informing her that I should probably sleep that night at Oxford; for I was off on a few days' holiday, and I liked Ethel to know where a letter or telegram would reach me each day, as we were both a little anxious about the baby's teething. Even while I pen these words now, the grim humour of the situation comes back to me vividly. Thousands of fathers and mothers were anxious that morning about similar trifles, whose pettiness was brought home to them with an appalling shock in the all embracing horror of that day's calamity.

About ten o'clock I inflated my tyres and got under way. I meant to ride towards Oxford by a leisurely and circuitous route, along the windings of the river, past Marlow and Henley; so I began by crossing Cookham Bridge, a wooden or iron structure, I scarcely remember which It spanned the Thames close by the village—the curious will find its exact position marked in the maps of the period



"HE WAS RUSHING WILDLY FORWARD, WITH PANIC IN HIS FACE."

In the middle of the bridge, I paused and surveyed that charming prospect, which I was the last of living men perhaps to see as it then existed Close by stood a weir; beside it, the stream divided into three separate branches, exquisitely backed up by the gentle green slopes of Hedsor and Cliveden I could never pass that typical English view without a glance of admiration; this morning, I pulled up my bicycle for a moment, and cast my eye down stream with more than my usual enjoyment of the smooth blue water and the tall white poplars whose leaves showed their gleaming silver in the breeze beside it. I might have gazed at it too long—and one minute more would have sufficed for my destruction—had not a cry from the tow-path a little farther up attracted my attention

It was a wild, despairing cry, like that of a man being overpowered and murdered

I am confident this was my first intimation of danger Two minutes before, it is true, I had heard a faint sound like distant rumbling of thunder, but nothing else. I am one of those who strenuously maintain that the catastrophe was *not* heralded by shocks of earthquake.*

I turned my eye up stream. For half a second I was utterly bewildered. Strange to say, I did not perceive at first the great flood of fire that was advancing towards me I saw only the man who had shouted — a miserable, cowering, terror stricken wretch, one of the abject creatures who used to earn a dubious livelihood in those days (when the river was a boulevard of pleasure) by towing boats up stream But now, he was rushing wildly forward, with panic in his face, I could see he looked as if close pursued by some wild beast behind him. "A mad dog!" I said to myself at the outset, "or else a bull in the meadow!"

I glanced back to see what his pursuer might be, and then, in one second, the whole horror and terror of the catastrophe burst upon me. Its whole horror and terror, I say, but not yet its magnitude. I was aware at first just of a moving red wall, like

* For an apposite opinion, see Dr Haigh Withers's evidence in Vol. III. of the Blue book.

dull, red-hot molten metal. Trying to recall at so safe a distance in time and space the feelings of the moment and the way in which they surged and succeeded one another, I think I can recollect that my earliest idea was no more than this: "He must run, or the moving wall will overtake him!" Next instant, a hot wave seemed to strike my face. It was just like the blast of heat that strikes one in a glasshouse when you stand in front of the boiling and seething glass in the furnace. At about the same point in time, I was aware, I believe, that the dull red wall was really a wall of fire. But it was cooled by contact with the air and the water. Even as I looked, however, a second wave from behind seemed to rush on and break: it overlaid and outran the first one. This second wave was white, not red—at white heat, I realized. Then, with a burst of recognition, I knew what it all meant. What Ward had spoken of last night—a fissure eruption!

I looked back. Ward was coming towards me on the bridge, mounted on his Columbia. Too speechless to utter one word, I pointed up stream with my hand. He nodded and shouted back, in a singularly calm voice: "Yes; just what I told you. A fissure-eruption!"

They were the last words I heard him speak. Not that he appreciated the danger less than I did, though his manner was cool, but he was wearing no clips to his trousers, and at that critical moment he caught his leg in his pedals. The accident disconcerted him; he dismounted hurriedly, and then, panic stricken as I judged, abandoned his machine. He tried to run. The error was fatal. He tripped and fell. What became of him afterward I will mention later.

But for the moment I saw only the poor wretch on the tow-path. He was not a hundred yards off, just beyond the little bridge which led over the opening to a private boat-house. But as he rushed forwards and shrieked, the wall of fire overtook him. I do not think it quite caught him. It is hard at such moments to judge what really happens, but I believe I saw him shrivel like a moth in a flame a few seconds before the advancing wall of fire swept over the boat-house. I have seen an insect shrivel just so when flung into the midst of white-hot coals. He seemed to go off in gas, leaving a shower of powdery ash to represent his bones behind him. But of this I do not pretend to be positive; I will allow that my own agitation was far too profound to permit of my observing anything with accuracy.

How high was the wall at that time? This has been much debated. I should guess, thirty feet (though it rose afterwards to more than two hundred), and it advanced rather faster than a man could run down the centre of the valley. (Later on, its pace accelerated greatly with subsequent outbursts.) In frantic haste, I saw or felt that only one chance of safety lay before me. I must strike up hill by the field path to Hedsor.

I rode for very life, with grim death behind me. Once well across the bridge, and turning up the hill, I saw Ward on the parapet, with his arms flung up, trying wildly to save himself by leaping into the river. Next instant he shrivelled I think, as the beggar had shrivelled; and it is to this complete combustion before the lava flood reached them that I attribute the circumstance (so

"NEXT INSTANT HE SHRIVELLED."

much commented upon in the scientific excavations among the ruins) that no casts of dead bodies, like those at Pompeii, have anywhere been found in the Thames Valley Desert. My own belief is that every human body was reduced to a gaseous condition by the terrific heat several seconds before the molten basalt reached it.

Even at the distance which I had now attained from the central mass, indeed, the heat was intolerable. Yet, strange to say, I saw few or no people flying as yet from the inundation. The fact is, the eruption came upon us so suddenly, so utterly without warning or premonitory symptoms (for I deny the earthquake shocks), that whole towns must have been destroyed before the inhabitants were aware that anything out of the common was happening. It is a sort of alleviation to the general horror to remember that a large proportion of the victims must have died without even knowing it; one second, they were laughing, talking, bargaining; the next, they were asphyxiated or reduced to ashes as you have seen a small fly disappear in an incandescent gas flame.

This, however, is what I learned afterward. At that moment, I was only aware of a frantic pace uphill, over a rough, stony road, and with my pedals working as I had never before worked them; while behind me, I saw purgatory let loose, striving hard to overtake me. I just knew that a sea of fire was filling the valley from end to end, and that its heat scorched my face as I urged on my bicycle in abject terror.

All this time, I will admit, my panic was purely personal. I was too much engaged in the engrossing sense of my own pressing danger to be vividly alive to the public catastrophe. I did not even think of Ethel and the children. But when I reached the hill by Hedsor Church—a neat, small building, whose shell still stands, though scorched and charred, by the edge of the desert—I was able to pause for half a minute to recover breath, and to look back upon the scene of the first disaster.

It was a terrible and yet I felt even then a beautiful sight—beautiful with the awful and unearthly beauty of a great forest fire, or a mighty conflagration in some crowded city. The whole river valley, up which I looked, was one sea of fire. Barriers of red-hot lava formed themselves for a moment now and again where the outer edge or vanguard of the inundation had cooled a little on the surface by exposure, and over these temporary dams, fresh cataracts of white-hot material poured themselves afresh into the valley beyond it. After a while, as the deeper portion of basalt was pushed out, all was white alike. So glorious it looked in the morning sunshine that one could hardly realize the appalling reality of that sea of molten gold; one might almost have imagined a splendid triumph of the scene-painter's art, did one not know that it was actually a river of fire, overwhelming, consuming, and destroying every object before it in its devastating progress.

I tried vaguely to discover the source of the disaster. Looking straight up stream, past Bourne End and Marlow, I descried with bleared and dazzled eyes a whiter mass than any, glowing fiercely in the daylight like an electric light, and filling up the narrow gorge of the river towards Hurley and Henley. I recollected at once that this portion of the valley was not usually visible from Hedsor Hill, and almost without thinking of it I instinctively guessed the reason why it had become so now: it was the centre of disturbance—the earth's crust just there had bulged upward slightly, till it cracked and gaped to emit the basalt.

Looking harder, I could make out (though it was like looking at the sun) that the glowing white dome-shaped mass, as of an electric light, was the molten lava as it gurgled from the mouth of the vast fissure. I say vast, because so it seemed to me, though, as everybody now knows, the actual gap where the earth opened measures no more than eight miles across, from a point near what was once Shiplake Ferry to the site of the old lime-kilns at Marlow. Yet when one saw the eruption actually taking place, the colossal scale of it was what most appalled one. A sea of fire, eight to twelve miles broad, in the familiar Thames Valley, impressed and terrified one a thousand times more than a sea of fire ten times as vast in the nameless wilds of Western America.

I could see dimly, too, that the flood spread in every direction from its central point, both up and down the river. To right and left, indeed, it was soon checked and hemmed in by the hills about Wargrave and Medmenham; but downward, it had filled the entire valley as far as Cookham and beyond; while upward, it spread in one vast glowing sheet towards Reading and the flats by the confluence of the Kennet. I did not then know, of course, that this gigantic natural dam or barrier was later on to fill up the whole low-lying level, and so block the

course of the two rivers as to form those twin expanses of inland water, Lake Newbury and Lake Oxford. Tourists who now look down on still summer evenings where the ruins of Magdalen and of Merton may be dimly descried through the pale green depths, their broken masonry picturesquely overgrown with tangled water-weeds, can form but little idea of the terrible scene which that peaceful bank presented while the incandescent lava was pouring forth in a scorching white flood towards the doomed district. Merchants who crowd the busy quays of those mushroom cities which have sprung up with greater rapidity than Chicago or Johannesburg on the indented shore where the new lakes abut upon the Berkshire Chalk Downs have half forgotten the horror of the intermediate time when the waters of the two rivers rose slowly, slowly, day after day, to choke their valleys and overwhelm some of the most glorious architecture in Britain. But though I did not know and could not then foresee the remoter effects of the great fire flood in that direction, I saw enough to make my heart stand still within me. It was with difficulty that I grasped my bicycle, my hands trembled so fiercely I realized that I was a spectator of the greatest calamity which had befallen a civilized land within the ken of history.

I looked southward along the valley in the direction of Maidenhead. As yet it did not occur to me that the catastrophe was anything more than a local flood, though even as such it would have been one of unexampled vastness. My imagination could hardly conceive that London itself was threatened. In those days one could not grasp the idea of the destruction of London I only thought just at first, "It will go on towards Maidenhead!" Even as I thought it, I saw a fresh and fiercer gush of fire well out from the central gash, and flow still faster than ever down the centre of the valley, over the hardening layer already cooling on its edge by contact with the air and soil This new outburst fell in a mad cataract over the end or van of the last, and instantly spread like water across the level expanse between the Cliveden hills and the opposite range at Pinkneys I realized with a throb that it was advancing towards Windsor Then a wild fear thrilled through me If Windsor, why not Staines and Chertsey and Hounslow? If Hounslow, why not London?

In a second I remembered Ethel and the children Hitherto, the immediate danger of my own position alone had struck me. The fire was so near, the heat of it rose up in my face and daunted me But now I felt I must make a wild dash to warn—not London—no, frankly, I forgot those millions; but Ethel and my little ones. In that thought, for the first moment, the real vastness of the catastrophe came home to me The Thames Valley was doomed! I must ride for dear life if I wished to save my wife and children!

I mounted again, but found my shaking feet could hardly work the pedals My legs were one jelly With a frantic effort, I struck off inland in the direction of Burnham I did not think my way out definitely, I hardly knew the topography of the district well enough to form any clear conception of what route I must take in order to keep to the hills and avoid the flood of fire that was deluging the lowlands But by pure instinct, I believe, I set my face Londonwards along the ridge of the chalk downs In three minutes I had lost sight of the burning flood, and was deep among green lanes and under shadowy

"WITH A FRANTIC EFFORT I STRUCK OFF INLAND."

beeches The very contrast frightened me. I wondered if I was going mad It was all so quiet. One could not believe that scarce five miles off from that devastating sheet of fire, birds were singing in the sky and men toiling in the fields as if nothing had happened.

Near Lambourne Wood I met a brother cyclist, just about to descend the hill. A curve in the road hid the valley from him. I shouted aloud :—

"For Heaven's sake, don't go down! There is danger, danger!"

He smiled and looked back at me "I can take any hill in England," he answered.

"It's not the hill," I burst out. "There has been an eruption—a fissure-eruption at Marlow—great floods of fire—and all the valley is filled with burning lava!"

He stared at me derisively. Then his expression changed of a sudden I suppose he saw I was white-faced and horror-stricken. He drew away as if alarmed. "Go back to Colney Hatch!" he cried, pedalling faster, and rode hastily down the hill, as if afraid of me. I have no doubt he must have ridden into the very midst of the flood, and been scorched by its advance, before he could check his machine on so sudden a slope.

Between Lambourne Wood and Burnham I did not see the fire-flood I rode on at full speed among green fields and meadows. Here and there I passed a labouring man on the road. More than one looked up at me and commented on the oppressive heat, but none of them seemed to be aware of the fate that was overtaking their own homes close by, in the valley. I told one or two, but they laughed and gazed after me as if I were a madman I grew sick of warning them. They took no heed of my words, but went on upon their way as if nothing out of the common were happening to England.

On the edge of the down, near Burnham, I caught sight of the valley again. Here, people were just awaking to what was taking place near them Half the population was gathered on the slope, looking down with wonder on the flood of fire, which had now just turned the corner of the hills by Taplow. Silent terror was the prevailing type of expression. But when I told them I had seen the lava bursting forth from the earth in a white dome above Marlow, they laughed me to scorn; and when I assured them I was pushing forward in hot haste to London, they answered, "London! It won't never get as far as London!" That was the only place on the hills, as is now well known, where the flood was observed long enough beforehand to telegraph and warn the inhabitants of the great city, but nobody thought of doing it, and I must say, even if they had done so, there is not the slightest probability that the warning would have attracted the least attention in our ancient Metropolis. Men on the Stock Exchange would have made jests about the slump, and proceeded to buy and sell as usual.

I measured with my eye the level plain between Burnham and Slough, calculating roughly with myself whether I should have time to descend upon the well-known road from Maidenhead to London by Colnbrook and Hounslow. (I advise those who are unacquainted with the topography of this district before the eruption to follow out my route on a good map of the period.) But I recognised in a moment that this course would be impossible. At the rate that the flood had taken to progress from Cookham Bridge to Taplow, I felt sure it would be upon me before I reached Upton, or Ditton Park at the out side It is true the speed of the advance might slacken somewhat as the lava cooled; and strange to say, so rapidly do realities come to be accepted in one's mind, that I caught myself thinking this thought in the most natural manner, as if I had all my life long been accustomed to the ways of fissure-eruptions. But on the other hand, the lava might well out faster and hotter than before, as I had already seen it do more than once, and I had no certainty even that it would not rise to the level of the hills on which I was standing You who read this narrative nowadays take it for granted, of course, that the extent and height of the inundation was bound to be exactly what you know it to have been; we at the time could not guess how high it might rise and how large an area of the country it might overwhelm and devastate. Was it to stop at the Chilterns, or to go north to Birmingham, York, and Scotland?

Still, in my trembling anxiety to warn my wife and children, I debated with myself whether I should venture down into the valley, and hurry along the main road with a wild burst for London. I thought of Ethel, alone in our little home at Bayswater, and almost made up my mind to risk it. At that moment, I became aware that the road to London was already crowded with carriages, carts, and cycles, all dashing at a mad pace unanimously towards London. Suddenly a fresh wave turned the corner by Taplow and Maidenhead Bridge,

and began to gain upon them visibly. It was an awful sight. I cannot pretend to describe it. The poor creatures on the road, men and animals alike, rushed wildly, despairingly on, the fire took them from behind, and, one by one, before the actual sea reached them, I saw them shrivel and melt away in the fierce white heat of the advancing inundation. I could not look at it any longer. I certainly could not descend and court instant death. I felt that my one chance was to strike across the downs, by Stoke Poges and Uxbridge, and then try the line of northern heights to London.

Oh, how fiercely I pedalled! At Farnham Royal (where again nobody seemed to be aware what had happened) a rural policeman tried to stop me for frantic riding. I tripped him up, and rode on. Experience had taught me it was no use telling those who had not seen it of the disaster. A little beyond, at the entrance to a fine park, a gatekeeper attempted to shut a gate in my face, exclaiming that the road was private. I saw it was the only practicable way without descending to the valley, and I made up my mind this was no time for trifling. I am a man of peace, but I lifted my fist and planted it between his eyes. Then, before he could recover from his astonishment, I had mounted again and ridden on across the park, while he ran after me in vain, screaming to the men in the pleasure-grounds to stop me. But I would not be stopped, and I emerged on the road once more at Stoke Poges.

"THE POOR CREATURES RUSHED WILDLY DESPAIRINGLY ON"

Near Galley Hill, after a long and furious ride, I reached the descent to Uxbridge. Was it possible to descend? I glanced across, once more by pure instinct, for I had never visited the spot before, towards where I felt the Thames must run. A great white cloud hung over it. I saw what that cloud must mean: it was the steam of the river, where the lava sucked it up and made it seethe and boil suddenly. I had not noticed this white fleece of steam at Cookham, though I did not guess why till afterwards. In the narrow valley where the Thames ran between hills, the lava flowed over it all at once, bottling the steam beneath; and it is this imprisoned steam that gave rise in time to the subsequent series of appalling earthquakes, to supply forecasts of which is now the chief duty of the Seismologer Royal; whereas, in the open plain, the basalt advanced more gradually and in a thinner stream, and therefore turned the whole mass of water into white cloud as soon as it reached each bend of the river.

At the time, however, I had no leisure to think out all this. I only knew by such indirect signs that the flood was still advancing, and, therefore, that it would be impossible for me to proceed towards London by the direct route *viâ* Uxbridge and Hanwell. If I meant to reach town (as we called it familiarly), I must descend to the valley at once, pass through Uxbridge streets as fast as I could, make a dash across the plain, by what I afterwards knew to be Hillingdon (I saw it then as a nameless

village), and aim at a house-crowned hill, which I only learned later was Harrow, but which I felt sure would enable me to descend upon London by Hampstead or Highgate.

I am no strategist; but in a second, in that extremity, I picked out these points, feeling dimly sure they would lead me home to Ethel and the children.

The town of Uxbridge (whose place you can still find marked on many maps) lay in the valley of a small river, a confluent of the Thames. Up this valley it was certain that the lava-stream must flow; and, indeed, at the present day, the basin around is completely filled by one of the solidest and most forbidding masses of black basalt in the country. Still, I made up my mind to descend and cut across the low lying ground towards Harrow. If I failed, I felt, after all, I was but one unit more in what I now began to realize as a prodigious national calamity.

I was just coasting down the hill, with Uxbridge lying snug and unconscious in the glen below me, when a slight and unimportant accident occurred which almost rendered impossible my further progress. It was past the middle of August, the hedges were being cut, and this particular lane, bordered by a high thorn fence, was strewn with the mangled branches of the may bushes. At any other time I should have remembered the danger and avoided them; that day, hurrying down hill for dear life and for Ethel, I forgot to notice them. The consequence was, I was pulled up suddenly by finding my front wheel deflated*, this untimely misfortune almost unmanned me. I dismounted and examined the tyre. It had received a bad puncture. I tried inflating again, in hopes the hole might be small enough to make that precaution sufficient. But it was quite useless. I found I must submit to stop and doctor up the puncture. Fortunately, I had the necessary apparatus in my wallet.

I think it was the weirdest episode of all that weird ride—this sense of stopping impatiently, while the fiery flood still surged on towards London, in order to go through all the fiddling and troublesome little details of mending a pneumatic tyre. The moment and the operation seemed so sadly out of harmony. A countryman passed by on a cart, obviously suspecting nothing, that was another point which added horror to the occasion—that so near the catastrophe, so very few people were even aware what was taking place beside them. Indeed, as is well known, I was one of the very few who saw the eruption during its course, and yet managed to escape from it. Elsewhere, those who tried to run before it, either to escape themselves or to warn others of the danger, were overtaken by the lava before they could reach a place of safety. I attribute this mainly to the fact that most of them continued along the high roads in the valley, or fled instinctively for shelter towards their homes, instead of making at once for the heights and the uplands.

"THE MORE HASTE THE LESS SPEED," HE SAID.

* The bicycles of that period were fitted with pneumatic tubes of india-rubber as tyres—a clumsy device, now long superseded.

The countryman stopped and looked at me.

"The more haste the less speed!" he said, with proverbial wisdom.

I glanced up at him, and hesitated. Should I warn him of his doom, or was it useless?

"Keep up on the hills," I said, at last. "An unspeakable calamity is happening in the valley. Flames of fire are flowing down it, as from a great burning mountain. You will be cut off by the eruption."

He stared at me blankly, and burst into a meaningless laugh. "Why, you're one of them Salvation Army fellows," he exclaimed, after a short pause. "You're trying to preach to me. I'm going to Uxbridge." And he continued down the hill towards certain destruction.

It was hours, I feel sure, before I had patched up that puncture, though I did it by the watch in four and a half minutes. As soon as I had blown out my tyre again I mounted once more, and rode at a break-neck pace to Uxbridge. I passed down the straggling main street of the suburban town, crying aloud as I went, "Run, run, to the downs! A flood of lava is rushing up the valley! To the hills, for your lives! All the Thames bank is blazing!" Nobody took the slightest heed; they stood still in the street for a minute with open mouths: then they returned to their customary occupations. A quarter of an hour later, there was no such place in the world as Uxbridge.

I followed the main road through the village which I have since identified as Hillingdon; then I diverged to the left, partly by roads and partly by field paths of whose exact course I am still uncertain, towards the hill at Harrow. When I reached the town, I did not strive to rouse the people, partly because my past experience had taught me the futility of the attempt, and partly because I rightly judged that they were safe from the inundation, for as it never quite covered the dome of St Paul's, part of which still protrudes from the sea of basalt, it did not reach the level of the northern heights of London. I rode on through Harrow without one word to any body. I did not desire to be stopped or harassed as an escaped lunatic.

From Harrow I made my way tortuously along the rising ground, by the light of nature, through Wembley Park, to Willesden. At Willesden, for the first time, I found to a certainty that London was threatened. Great crowds of people in the profoundest excitement stood watching a dense cloud of smoke and steam that spread rapidly over the direction of Shepherd's Bush and Hammersmith. They were speculating as to its meaning, but laughed incredulously when I told them what it portended. A few minutes later, the smoke spread ominously towards Kensington and Paddington. That settled my fate. It was clearly impossible to descend into London; and indeed, the heat now began to be unendurable. It drove us all back, almost physically. I thought I must abandon all hope. I should never even know what had become of Ethel and the children.

My first impulse was to lie down and await the fire-flood. Yet the sense of the greatness of the catastrophe seemed somehow to blunt one's own private grief. I was beside myself with fear for my darlings; but I realized that I was but one among hundreds of thousands of fathers in the same position. What was happening at that moment in the great city of five million souls we did not know, we shall never know; but we may conjecture that the end was mercifully too swift to entail much needless suffering. All at once, a gleam of hope struck me. It was my father's birthday. Was it not just possible that Ethel might have taken the children up to Hampstead to wish their grandpapa many happy returns of the day? With a wild determination not to give up all for lost, I turned my front wheel in the direction of Hampstead Hill, still skirting the high ground as far as possible. My heart was on fire within me. A restless anxiety urged me to ride my hardest. As all along the route, I was still just a minute or two in front of the catastrophe. People were beginning to be aware that something was taking place, more than once as I passed they asked me eagerly where the fire was. It was impossible for me to believe by this time that they knew nothing of an event in whose midst I seemed to have been living for months; how could I realize that all the things which had happened since I started from Cookham Bridge so long ago were really compressed into the space of a single morning?—nay, more, of an hour and a half only?

As I approached Windmill Hill, a terrible sinking seized me. I seemed to totter on the brink of a precipice. Could Ethel be safe? Should I ever again see little Bertie and the baby? I pedalled on as if automatically, for all life had gone out of me. I felt my hip-joint moving dry in its socket. I held my breath, my heart stood still. It was a ghastly moment.

At my father's door I drew up, and opened the garden gate. I hardly dared to

go in. Though each second was precious, I paused and hesitated.

At last I turned the handle. I heard somebody within. My heart came up in my mouth. It was little Bertie's voice: "Do it again, Granpa; do it again, it amooses Bertie!"

I rushed into the room. "Bertie, Bertie!" I cried. "Is Mammy here?"

He flung himself upon me. "Mammy, Mammy, Daddy has comed home." I burst into tears. "And Baby?" I asked, trembling.

"Baby and Ethel are here, George," my father answered, staring at me. "Why, my boy, what's the matter?"

I flung myself into a chair and broke down. In that moment of relief, I felt that London was lost, but I had saved my wife and children.

I did not wait for explanations. A crawling four wheeler was loitering by. I hailed it, and hurried them in. My father wished to discuss the matter, but I cut him short. I gave the driver three pounds—all the gold I had with me. "Drive on!" I shouted, "drive on! Towards Hatfield—anywhere!"

He drove as he was bid. We spent that night, while Hampstead flared like a beacon, at an isolated farm house on the high ground in Hertfordshire. For, of course, though the flood did not reach so high, it set fire to everything inflammable in its neighbourhood.

Next day, all the world knew the magnitude of the disaster. It can only be summed up in five emphatic words. There was no more London.

I have one other observation alone to make. I noticed at the time how, in my personal relief, I forgot for the moment that London was perishing. I even forgot that my house and property had perished. Exactly the opposite, it seemed to me, happened with most of those survivors who lost wives and children in the eruption. They moved about as in a dream, without a tear, without a complaint, helping others to provide for the needs of the homeless and houseless. The universality of the catastrophe made each man feel as though it were selfishness to attach too great an importance at such a crisis to his own personal losses. Nay, more, the burst of feverish activity and nervous excitement, I might even say enjoyment, which followed the horror, was traceable, I think, to this self-same cause. Even grave citizens felt they must do their best to dispel the universal gloom, and they plunged accordingly into a round of dissipations which other nations thought both unseemly and un-English. It was one way of expressing the common emotion. We had all lost heart—and we flocked to the theatres to pluck up our courage. That, I believe, must be our national answer to M. Zola's strictures on our untimely levity. "This people," says the great French author, "which took its pleasures sadly while it was rich and prosperous, begins to dance and sing above the ashes of its capital—it makes merry by the open graves of its wives and children. What an enigma! What a puzzle! What chance of an Œdipus!"

I FLUNG MYSELF INTO A CHAIR AND BROKE DOWN

By Cutcliffe Hyne

IT is not in the least expected that the general public will believe the statements which will be made in this paper. They are written to catch the eye of Mr. Wilfred Cecil Cording (or Cordy) if he still lives, or in the event of his death to carry some news of his last movements to any of his still existing friends and relations. Further details may be had from me (by any of these interested people) at Poste Restante, Kettlewell, Wharfedale, Yorkshire. My name is Chesney, and I am sufficiently well known there for letters to be forwarded to wherever I may be at the moment.

The matters in question happened two years ago on the last day of August. I had a small, high ground shoot near Kettlewell, but that morning all the upper parts of the hill were thick with dense mist, and shooting was out of the question. However, I had been going it pretty hard since the Twelfth, and was not sorry for an off-day, the more so as there was a newly found cave in the neighbourhood which I was anxious to explore thoroughly. Incidentally I may mention that cave hunting and shooting were my only two amusements.

It was my keeper who brought me news to the inn about the impossibility of shooting, and I suggested to him that he should come with me to inspect the cave. He made some sort of excuse—I forget what—and I did not press the matter further. He was a Kettlewell native, and the dalesmen up there look upon the local caves with more awe than respect. They will not own up to believing in bogles, but I fancy their creed runs that way. I used to have a contempt for their qualms, but latterly I have somehow or other learned to respect them.

I had taken unwilling helpers cave hunting with me before, and found them such a nuisance that I had made up my mind not to be bothered with them again; so, as I say, I did not press for the keeper's society, but took candles, matches in a bottle, some magnesium wire, a small coil of rope, and a large flask of whisky, and set off alone.

The clouds above were wet, and a fine rain fell persistently. I tramped off along one of the three main roads that lead from the village, but which road it was had better remain hidden for the present. And in time I got off this road and cut over the moor.

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What I was looking for was a fresh scar on the hillside, caused by a roof-fall in one of the countless caves which honeycomb this limestone district, and, although I had got my bearings pretty accurately, the fog was so thick up there that I had to take a good dozen casts before I hit upon the place.

I had not seen it since the 10th of August, when I first stumbled across it by accident whilst I was going over the hill to see how the birds promised for the following Twelfth, and I was a good deal annoyed to find by the boot-marks that quite a lot of people had visited it in the interval. However, I hoped that the larger part of these were made by shepherds, and perhaps by my own keepers, and, remembering their qualms, trusted that I might find the interior still untampered with.

The cave was easy enough to enter. There was a funnel-shaped slide of peat-earth and mud and clay to start with, well pitted with boot-marks, and then there was a tumbled wall of boulders, slanting inwards, down which I crawled face uppermost till the light behind me dwindled. The way was getting pretty murky, so I lit up a candle to avoid accidents, stepped knee-deep into a lively stream of water, and went briskly ahead. It was an ordinary enough limestone cave so far, with inferior stalactites, and a good deal of wet everywhere. It did not appear to have been disturbed, and I stepped along cheerfully.

Presently I got a bit of a shock. The roof above began to droop downwards, slowly but relentlessly. It seemed as though my way was soon going to be blocked. However, the water beneath deepened, and so I waded along to inspect as far on as possible. It was a cold job, for the water was icy, but then I am a bit of an enthusiast about cave-hunting, and it takes more than a trifle of discomfort to stop me.

The roof came down and down till I was forced into the water up to my chin, and the air, too, was none of the best. I was beginning to get disappointed; it looked as if I had got wet through to the bone with freezing cold cave water for no adequate result.

However, there is no accounting for the freaks of caves. Just when I fancied I was at the end of my tether, up went the roof again. I was able to stand erect once more, and a dozen yards farther on I came out on to dry rock, and was able to have a rest and a drop of whisky. The roof had quite disappeared to candle-light overhead, so I burned a foot of magnesium wire for a better inspection. It was really a magnificent cave.

But I did not stop to make any accurate measurements or drawings then, and, for reasons which will appear, I have not been near to do so since. I was too cold to care for prolonged admiration, and I wanted to (so to speak) annex the whole of the cave's main contours before I took my departure. I was first man in, and wished to be able to describe the whole of my find. There is a certain keen emulation about these matters amongst cave-hunters.

So I walked on over the flat floor of rock, stepping over and through pools, and round boulders, and dodging round stalactites, which hung from the unseen roof above, and slipping between slimy palings of stalagmite which sprouted from the floor. And then I came to a regular big subterranean tarn, which stretched right across the cavern.

Spaces were big here, and the candle did little to show them. It burned brightly enough, and that pleased me; one has to be very careful in cave-hunting about foul air, because once overcome by that, it means certain death. The air in this cave, however, did not altogether pass muster, there was something new about it, and anything new in cave smells is always suspicious. It wasn't the smell of peat, or iron, or sandstone, or limestone, or fungus, though all these are common enough in caves; it was a sort of faint musky smell, and I had got an idea that it was in flavour rather sickly. It is hard to define these things, but that smell, although it might very possibly lead to a new discovery, somehow did not cheer me. In fact, at times, when I inhaled a deeper breath of it than usual, it came very near to making my flesh creep.

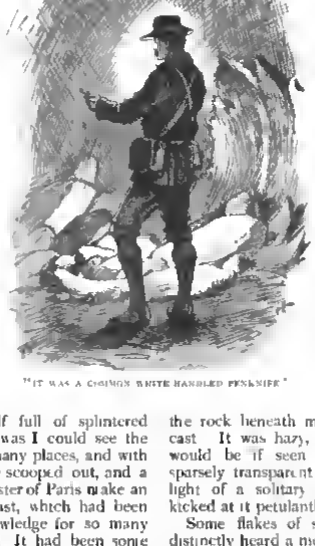
However, hesitations of this kind are not business. I nipped off another foot of magnesium wire, lit it at the candle, and held the flaming end high above my head. Before me the water of the tarn lay motionless as a mirror of black glass, the sides vignetted away into alleys and bays, the roof was a groined and fretted dome, far overhead, and at the farther side was a beach of white tumbled limestone.

I pitched a stone into the black water, and the mirror broke (I was pleased to think) for the first time during a million years into ripples. Yes, it's worth even a year of hard cave-hunting to do a thing like that.

The stone sank with a luscious *plop*. The water was very deep. But I was wet to the neck already, and didn't mind a swim. So with a lump of clay I stuck one candle in my cap, set up a couple more on the dry rock as

a lighthouse to guide my return, lowered myself into the black water, and struck out. The smell of musk oppressed me, and I fancied it was growing more pronounced. So I didn't dawdle. Roughly, I guessed the pool to be some five-and-thirty yards across.

I landed amongst the white broken limestone on the farther side, with a shiver and a scramble, and there was no doubt about the smell of musk now; it was strong enough to make me cough. But when I had stood up, got the candle in my hand again, and peered about through the dark, a thrill came through me as I thought I guessed at the cause. A dozen yards farther on amongst the tumbled stone was a broken "cast," where some monstrous uncouth animal had been entombed in the forgotten ages of the past, and mouldered away and left only the outer shell of its form and shape. For ages this, too, had endured, indeed, it had only been violated by the eroding touch of the water and some earth tremor within the last few days, perhaps at the same time that the "slip" was made in the moor far above, which gave an entrance to the caves.



"IT WAS A COMMON WHITE HANDLED PENKNIFE."

The "cast" was half full of splintered rubbish, but even as it was I could see the contour of its sides in many places, and with care the *debris* could be scooped out, and a workman could with plaster of Paris make an exact model of this beast, which had been lost to the world's knowledge for so many weary millions of years. It had been some sort of a lizard or a crocodile, and, in fancy, I was beginning to picture its restored shape posed in the National Museum, with my name underneath as discoverer, when my eye fell on something amongst the rubble which brought me to earth with a jar. I stooped and picked it up. It was a common white handled penknife, of the variety sold by stationers for a shilling. On one side of it was the name of Wilfred Cecil Cording (or Cordy), scratched apparently with a nail. The work was neat enough to start with, but the engraver had wearied with his job, and the "Cecil" was slipshod, and the surname too scratchy to be certain about.

On the hot impulse of the moment, I threw the knife far from me into the black water, and swore. It is more than a bit unpleasant for an explorer who has made a big discovery to find that he has been forestalled. But since then I have more than once regretted the hard things I said against Cording (if that is his name) in the heat of my first passion. If the man is alive I apologize to him. If, as I strongly suspect, he came to a horrible end there in the cave, I tender my regrets to his relatives.

I looked upon the cast of the salman now with the warmth of discovery quite gone. I was conscious of cold, and, moreover, the musky smell of the place was vastly unpleasant. And I think I should straightway have gone back to daylight and a change of clothes down in Kettlewell, but for one thing. I seemed somehow or other to trace on the rock beneath me the outline of another cast. It was hazy, as a thing of the kind would be if seen through the medium of sparsely transparent limestone, and by the light of a solitary paraffin wax candle. I kicked at it petulantly.

Some flakes of stone shelled off, and I distinctly heard a more extensive crack.

I kicked again, harder—with all my might, in fact. More flakes shelled away, and there was a little volley of cracks this time. It did not feel like kicking against stone. It was like kicking against something that gave. And I could have sworn that the musky smell increased. I felt a curious glow coming over me that was part fright, part excitement, part, I fancy, nausea, but plucked up my courage

and held my breath, and kicked again, and again, and again. The laminæ of limestone flew up in tinkling showers. There was no doubt about there being something springy underneath now, and that it was the dead carcass of another lizard I hadn't a doubt. Here was luck, here was a find. Here was I the discoverer of the body of a prehistoric beast, preserved in the limestone down through all the ages, just as mammoths have been preserved in Siberian ice.

The quarrying of my boot heel was too slow for me. I stuck my candle by its clay socket to a rock, and picked up a handy boulder and beat away the sheets of the stone with that, and all the time I toiled, the springiness of the carcass beneath distinctly helped me. The smell of musk nearly made me sick, but I stuck to the work. There was no doubt about it now. More than once I barked my knuckles against the harsh, scaly skin of the beast itself—against the skin of this anachronism, which ought to have perished body and bones ten million years ago. I remember wondering whether they would make me a baronet for the discovery. They do make scientific baronets nowadays for the bigger finds.

Then of a sudden I got a start. I could have sworn the dead flesh moved beneath me.

But I shouted aloud at myself in contempt. "Pah!" I said, "ten million years: the ghost is rather stale by this!" And I set to work afresh, beating away the stone which covered the beast from my sight.

But again I got a start, and this time it was a more solid one. After I had delivered my blow, and whilst I was raising my weapon for another, a splinter of stone broke away as if pressed up from below, flipped up in the air, and tinkled back to a standstill. My blood chilled, and for a moment the loneliness of that unknown cave oppressed me. But I told myself that I was an old hand; that this was childishness; and, in fact, pulled myself together. I refused to accept the hint. I deliberately put the candle so as to throw a better light, swallowed back my tremors, and battered afresh at the laminated rock.

Twice more I was given warnings, and disregarded them in the name of what I was pleased to call cold common reason; but the third time I dropped the battering stone as though it burnt me, and darted back with the most horrible shock of terror which (I make bold to say) any man could endure and still retain his senses.

There was no doubt about it—the beast was actually moving.

Yes, moving and alive. It was writhing, and straining, and struggling to leave its rocky bed where it had lain quiet through all those countless cycles of time, and I watched it in a very petrification of terror. Its efforts threw up whole basketfuls of splintered stone at a time. I could see the muscles of its back ripple at each effort. I could see the exposed part of its body grow in size every time it wrenched at the walls of that semi-eternal prison.

"I WATCHED IT IN A VERY PETRIFICATION OF TERROR."

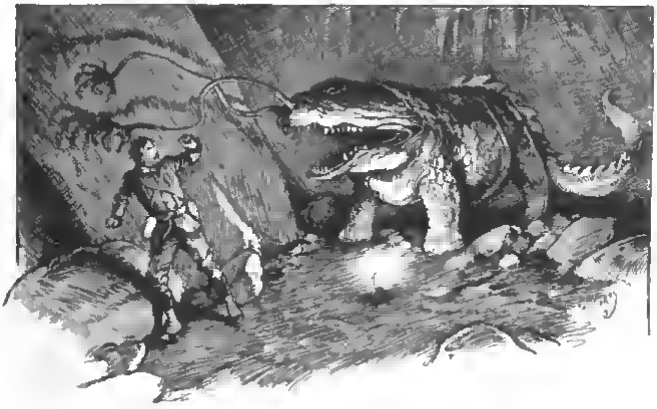
Then, as I looked, it doubled up its back like a bucking horse, and drew out its stumpy head and long feelers, giving out the while a thin, small scream like a hurt child, and then with another effort it pulled out its long tail and stood upon the *débris* of the limestone, panting with a new found life.

I gazed upon it with a sickly fascination. Its body was about the bigness of two horses. Its head was curiously short, but the mouth opened back almost to the forearm, and sprouting from the nose were two enormous feelers, or antennæ, each at least 6ft. long, and tipped with fleshy tendrils like fingers, which opened and shut tremulously. Its four legs were jointless, and ended in mere club feet, or callosities; its tail was long, supple, and fringed on the top with a saw like row of scales. In colour, it was a bright grass-green, all except the feelers, which were of a livid blue. But mere words go poorly for a description, and the beast was outside the vocabulary of to-day. It conveyed, somehow or other, a horrible sense of deformity, which made one physically ill to look upon it.

Worse, it hobbled round clumsily with its jointless legs, and waved its feelers in my direction. I could not make out that it had any eyes—anyway, they did not show distinct from the rough skin of its head; its sensitiveness seemed to lie in those fathom-long feelers and in the fleshy fingers which twitched and grappled at the end of them.

Then it opened its great jaws—which hinged, as I said, down by the forearm—and yawned cavernously, and came towards me. It seemed to have no trace of fear or hesitation. It hobbled clumsily on, exhibiting its monstrous deformity in every movement, and preceded always by those hateful feelers which seemed to be endued with an impish activity.

For a while I stayed in my place, too paralyzed by horror at this awful thing I had dragged up from the forgotten dead, to move or breathe. But then one of its livid blue feelers—a hard, armoured thing like a lobster's—touched me, and the fleshy fingers at the end of it pawed my face and burned me like nettles. I leaped into movement again.



"I TURNED AND RAN"

But worst of all was the musky smell. That increased till it became well-nigh unendurable, and though I half strangled myself to suppress a sound, I had to yield at last and give my feelings vent.

The beast heard me. I could not see that it had any ears, but anyway it distinctly heard me. The beast was hungry after its fast of ten million years; it was trying to make me its prey—those fearful jaws——

I turned and ran.

It followed me. In the feeble light of the one solitary candle I could see it following accurately in my track, with the waving

feelers and their twitching fingers preceding it. It had pace, too. Its gait, with those clumsy, jointless legs, reminded one of a barrel bellied sofa suddenly endowed with life, and careering over rough ground. But it distinctly had pace, and what was worse, the pace increased. At first it had the rust of those eternal ages to work out of its cankered joints; but this stiffness passed away, and fumbling got it out and opened the blade. The feelers with their fringe of fumbling fingers were close to me. I slashed at them viciously, and felt my knife grate against their armour. I might as well have hacked at an iron rail.

Still, the attempt did me good. There is an animal love for fighting stowed away in the bottom of all of us somewhere, and mine

"I STABBED AT THE BEAST WITH MY KNIFE."

presently it was following me with a speed equal to my own.

If this huge green beast had shown anger, or eagerness, or any of those things, it would have been less horrible; but it was absolutely unemotional in its hunt, and this helped to paralyze me, and in the end, when it drove me into a *cul-de-sac* amongst the rocks, I was very near surrendering myself through sheer terror to what seemed the inevitable. I wondered dully whether there had been another beast entombed beside it, and whether that had eaten the man who owned the penknife.

But the idea warmed me up. I had a stout knife in my own pocket, and after some woke then. I don't know that I expected to win; but I did intend to do the largest possible amount of damage before I was caught. I made a rush, stepped with one foot on the beast's creeping back, and leaped astern of him; and the beast gave its thin, small whistling scream, and turned quickly in chase after me.

The pace was getting terrific. We doubled, and turned, and sprawled, and leapt amongst the slimy boulders, and every time we came to close quarters I stabbed at the beast with my knife, but without ever finding a joint in its armour. The tough skin gave to the weight of the blows, it is true, but it was like stabbing with a stick upon leather.

It was clear, though, that this could not go on. The beast grew in strength and activity, and probably in dumb anger, though actually it was unemotional as ever; but I was every moment growing more blown and more bruised and more exhausted.

At last I tripped and fell. The beast with its clumsy waddle shot past me before it could pull up, and in desperation I threw one arm and my knees around its grass-green tail, and with my spare hand drove the knife with the full of my force into the underneath part of its body.

That woke it at last. It writhed, and it plunged, and it bucked with a frenzy that I had never seen before, and its scream grew in piercingness till it was strong as the whistle of a steam-engine. But still I hung doggedly on to my place, and planted my vicious blows. The great beast doubled and tried to reach me; it flung its livid blue feelers backwards in vain efforts: I was beyond its clutch. And then, with my weight still on its back, it gave over dancing about the floor of the cavern, and set off at its hobbling gait directly for the water.

Not till it reached the brink did I slip off, but I saw it plunge in, I saw it swim strongly with its tail, and then I saw it dive and disappear for good.

And what next? I took to the water too, and swam as I had never swum before—swam for dear life to the opposite side. I knew that if I waited to cool my thoughts I should never pluck up courage for the attempt. It was then or not at all. It was risk the horrors of that passage, or stay where I was and starve—and be eaten.

How I got across I do not know. How I landed I cannot tell. How I got down the windings of the cave and through that water-alley is more than I can say. And whether the beast followed me I do not know either. I got to daylight again somehow, staggering like a drunken man. I struggled down off the moor, and on to the village, and noted how the people ran from me. At the inn the landlord cried out as though I had been the plague. It seemed that the musky smell that I brought with me was unendurable, though, by this time, the mere detail of a smell was far beneath my notice. But I was stripped from my stinking clothes, and washed, and put to bed, and a doctor came and gave me an opiate, and when twelve hours later wakefulness came to me again, I had the sense to hold my tongue. All the village wanted to know from whence came that hateful odour of musk, but I said, stupidly, I did not know. I said I must have fallen into something.

And there the matter ends for the present. I go no more cave hunting, and I offer no help to those who do. But if the man who owned that white-handled penknife is alive, I should like to compare experiences with him; and if, as I strongly suspect, he is dead, these pages may be of interest to his relatives. He was not known in Kettlewell or any of the other villages where I inquired, but he could very well have come over the hills from Pateley Bridge way. "Cording" was the name scratched on the knife, or "Cordy," I could not be sure which, and, as I have said, mine is Chesney, and I can be heard of at the Kettlewell Post office, though I have given up the shooting on the moor near there. Somehow, the air of the district sickens me. There seems to be a taint in it.

THE STOLEN BODY

By H. G. Wells.

MR. BESSEL was the senior partner in the firm of Bessel, Hart, and Brown, of St. Paul's Churchyard, and for many years he was well known among those interested in psychical research as a liberal minded and conscientious investigator. He was an unmarried man, and instead of living in the suburbs, after the fashion of his class, he occupied rooms in the Albany, near Piccadilly. He was particularly interested in the questions of thought transference and of apparitions of the living, and in November, 1896, he commenced a series of experiments in conjunction with Mr. Vincent, of Staple Inn, in order to test the alleged possibility of projecting an apparition of oneself by force of will through space.

Their experiments were conducted in the following manner. At a pre-arranged hour Mr Bessel shut himself in one of his rooms in the Albany and Mr. Vincent in his sitting room in Staple Inn, and each then fixed his mind as resolutely as possible on the other. Mr Bessel had acquired the art of self hypnotism, and, so far as he could, he attempted first to hypnotize himself and then to project himself as a "phantom of the living" across the intervening space of nearly two miles into Mr Vincent's apartment. On several evenings this was tried without any satisfactory result, but on the fifth or sixth occasion Mr Vincent did actually see or imagine he saw an apparition of Mr Bessel standing in his room. He states that the appearance, although brief, was very vivid and real. He noticed that Mr Bessel's face was white and his expression anxious, and, moreover, that his hair was disordered. For a moment Mr. Vincent, in spite of his state of expectation, was too surprised to speak or move, and in that moment it seemed to him as though the figure glanced over its shoulder and incontinently vanished.

It had been arranged that an attempt should be made to photograph any phantasm seen, but Mr Vincent had not the instant presence of mind to snap the camera that lay ready on the table beside him, and when he did so he was too late. Greatly elated, however, even by this partial success, he made a note of the exact time, and at once took a cab to the Albany to inform Mr Bessel of this result.

He was surprised to find Mr. Bessel's outer door standing open to the night, and

the inner apartments lit and in an extraordinary disorder. An empty champagne magnum lay smashed upon the floor; its neck had been broken off against the inkpot on the bureau and lay beside it. An octagonal occasional table, which carried a bronze statuette and a number of choice books, had been rudely overturned, and down the primrose paper of the wall inky fingers had been drawn, as it seemed for the mere pleasure of defilement. One of the delicate chintz curtains had been violently torn from its rings and thrust upon the fire, so that the smell of its smouldering filled the room. Indeed, the whole place was disarranged in the strangest fashion. For a few minutes Mr. Vincent, who had entered sure of finding Mr. Bessel in his easy chair awaiting him, could scarcely believe his eyes, and stood staring helplessly at these unanticipated things.

Then, full of a vague sense of calamity, he sought the porter at the entrance lodge. "Where is Mr. Bessel?" he asked. "Do you know that all the furniture is broken in Mr. Bessel's room?" The porter said nothing, but, obeying his gestures, came at once to Mr. Bessel's apartment to see the state of affairs. "This settles it," he said, surveying the lunatic confusion. "I didn't know of this. Mr. Bessel's gone off. He's mad!"

He then proceeded to tell Mr. Vincent that about half an hour previously, that is to say, at about the time of Mr. Bessel's apparition in Mr. Vincent's rooms, the missing gentleman had rushed out of the gates of the Albany into Vigo Street, hatless and with disordered hair, and had vanished into the direction of Bond Street. "And as he went past me," said the porter, "he laughed—a sort of gasping laugh, with his mouth open and his eyes glaring—I tell you, sir, he fair scared me!—like this."

According to his imitation it was anything but a pleasant laugh. "He waved his hand, with all his fingers crooked and clawing—like that. And he said, in a sort of fierce whisper, '*Life!*' Just that one word, '*Life!*'"

"Dear me," said Mr. Vincent. "Tut, tut," and "Dear me!" He could think of nothing else to say. He was naturally very much surprised. He turned from the room to the porter and from the porter to the room in gravest perplexity. Beyond his suggestion that probably Mr. Bessel would come back presently and explain what had happened, their conversation was unable to proceed.

"It might be a sudden tooth-ache," said the porter, "a very sudden and violent tooth-ache, jumping on him suddenly like and driving him wild. I've broken things myself before now in such a case . . . . ." He thought. "If it was, why should he say '*life*' to me as he went past?"

Mr. Vincent did not know. Mr. Bessel did not return, and at last Mr. Vincent, having done some more helpless staring, and having addressed a note of brief inquiry and left it in a conspicuous position on the bureau, returned in a very perplexed frame of mind to his own premises in Staple Inn. This affair had given him a shock. He was at a loss to account for Mr. Bessel's conduct on any sane hypothesis. He tried to read, but he could not do so; he went for a short walk, and was so preoccupied that he narrowly escaped a cab at the top of Chancery Lane; and at last—a full hour before his usual time—he went to bed. For a considerable time he could not sleep because of his memory of the silent confusion of Mr. Bessel's apartment, and when at length he did attain an uneasy slumber it was at once disturbed by a very vivid and distressing dream of Mr. Bessel.

He saw Mr. Bessel gesticulating wildly, and with his face white and contorted. And, inexplicably mingled with his appearance, suggested perhaps by his gestures, was an intense fear, an urgency to act. He even believes that he heard the voice of his fellow experimenter calling distressfully to him, though at the time he considered this to be an illusion. The vivid impression remained though Mr. Vincent awoke. For a space he lay awake and trembling in the darkness, possessed with that vague, unaccountable terror of unknown possibilities that comes out of dreams upon even the bravest men. But at last he roused himself, and turned over and went to sleep again, only for the dream to return with enhanced vividness.

He awoke with such a strong conviction that Mr. Bessel was in overwhelming distress and need of help that sleep was no longer possible. He was persuaded that his friend had rushed out to some dire calamity. For a time he lay reasoning vainly against this belief, but at last he gave way to it. He arose, against all reason, lit his gas and dressed, and set out through the deserted streets—deserted, save for a noiseless policeman or so and the early news carts towards Vigo Street to inquire if Mr. Bessel had returned.

But he never got there. As he was going down Long Acre some unaccountable impulse turned him aside out of that street towards Covent Garden, which was just waking to its nocturnal activities. He saw the market in front of him—a queer effect of glowing yellow lights and busy black figures. He became aware of a shouting, and perceived a figure turn the corner by the hotel and run swiftly towards him. He knew at once that it was Mr Bessel. But it was Mr. Bessel transfigured. He was hatless and dishevelled, his collar was torn open, he grasped a bone-handle walking cane near the ferrule end, and his mouth was pulled awry. And he ran, with agile strides, very rapidly. Their encounter was the affair of an instant. "Bessel!" cried Vincent.

The running man gave no sign of recognition either of Mr. Vincent or of his own name. Instead, he cut at his friend savagely with the stick, hitting him in the face within an inch of the eye. Mr. Vincent, stunned and astonished, staggered back, lost his footing, and fell heavily on the pavement. It seemed to him that Mr Bessel leapt over him as he fell. When he looked again Mr Bessel had vanished, and a policeman and a number of garden porters and salesmen were rushing past towards Long Acre in hot pursuit.

"MR. BESSEL LEAPT OVER HIM AS HE FELL."

With the assistance of several passers-by—for the whole street was speedily alive with running people—Mr. Vincent struggled to his feet. He at once became the centre of a crowd greedy to see his injury. A multitude of voices competed to reassure him of his safety, and then to tell him of the behaviour of the madman, as they regarded Mr Bessel. He had suddenly appeared in the middle of the market screaming "*Life! Life!*" striking left and right with a blood-stained walking-stick, and dancing and shouting with laughter at each successful blow. A lad and two women had broken heads, and he had smashed a man's wrist; a little child had been knocked insensible, and for a time he had driven everyone before him, so furious and resolute had his behaviour been. Then he made a raid upon a coffee stall, hurled its paraffin flare through the window of the post office, and fled laughing, after stunning the foremost of the two policemen who had the pluck to charge him.

Mr Vincent's first impulse was naturally to join in the pursuit of his friend, in order if possible to save him from the violence of the indignant people. But his action was slow, the blow had half stunned him, and while this was still no more than a resolution came the news, shouted through the crowd, that Mr. Bessel had eluded his pursuers. At first Mr. Vincent could scarcely credit this, but the universality of the report, and presently the dignified return of two futile policemen, convinced him. After some aimless inquiries he returned towards Staple Inn, padding a handkerchief to a now very painful nose.

He was angry and astonished and perplexed. It appeared to him indisputable that Mr Bessel must have gone violently mad in the midst of his experiment in thought transference, but why that should make him appear with a sad white face in Mr Vincent's dreams seemed a problem beyond solution. He racked his brains in vain to explain this. It seemed to him at last that not simply Mr. Bessel, but the order of things must be insane. But he could think of nothing to do. He shut himself carefully into his room, lit his fire—it was a gas fire with asbestos bricks—and, fearing fresh dreams if he went to bed, remained bathing his injured face, or holding up books in a vain attempt to read, until dawn.

Throughout that vigil he had a curious persuasion that Mr. Bessel was endeavouring to speak to him, but he would not let himself attend to any such belief.

About dawn, his physical fatigue asserted itself, and he went to bed and slept at last in spite of dreaming. He rose late, unrested and anxious and in considerable facial pain. The morning papers had no news of Mr. Bessel's aberration — it had come too late for them. Mr. Vincent's perplexities, to which the fever of his bruise added fresh irritation, became at last intolerable, and, after a fruitless visit to the Albany, he went down to St. Paul's Churchyard to Mr. Hart, Mr. Bessel's partner, and, so far as Mr. Vincent knew, his nearest friend.

He was surprised to learn that Mr. Hart, although he knew nothing of the outbreak, had also been disturbed by a vision, the very vision that Mr. Vincent had seen—Mr. Bessel, white and dishevelled, pleading earnestly by his gestures for help. That was his impression of the import of his signs. "I was just going to look him up in the Albany when you arrived," said Mr. Hart. "I was so sure of something being wrong with him."

"FLOURISHING A CAN OF BURNING COLZA OIL."

As the outcome of their consultation the two gentlemen decided to inquire at Scotland Yard for news of their missing friend. "He is bound to be laid by the heels," said Mr. Hart. "He can't go on at that pace for long." But the police authorities had not laid Mr. Bessel by the heels. They confirmed Mr. Vincent's overnight experiences and added fresh circumstances, some of an even graver character than those he knew—a list of smashed glass along the upper half of Tottenham Court Road, an attack upon a policeman in Hampstead Road, and an atrocious assault upon a woman. All these outrages were committed between half-past twelve and a quarter to two in the morning, and between those hours—and, indeed, from the very moment of Mr. Bessel's first rush from his rooms at half-past nine in the evening—they could trace the deepening violence of his fantastic career. For the last hour, at least from before one, that is, until a quarter to two, he had run amuck through London, eluding with amazing agility every effort to stop or capture him.

But after a quarter to two he had vanished. Up to that hour witnesses were multitudinous. Dozens of people had seen him, fled from him or pursued him, and then things suddenly came to an end. At a quarter to two he had been seen running down the Euston Road towards Baker Street, flourishing a can of burning colza oil and jerking splashes of flame therefrom at the windows of the houses he passed. But none of the policemen on Euston Road beyond the Waxwork Exhibition, nor any of those in the side streets down which he must have passed had he left the Euston Road, had seen anything of him. Abruptly he disappeared. Nothing of his subsequent doings came to light in spite of the keenest inquiry.

Here was a fresh astonishment for Mr. Vincent. He had found considerable comfort in Mr. Hart's conviction. "He is bound to be laid by the heels before long," and in that assurance he had been able to suspend his mental perplexities. But any fresh development seemed destined to add new impossibilities to a pile already heaped beyond the powers of his acceptance. He found himself doubting whether his memory might not have played him some grotesque trick, debating

whether any of these things could possibly have happened, and in the afternoon he hunted up Mr Hart again to share the intolerable weight on his mind. He found Mr. Hart engaged with a well-known private detective, but as that gentleman accomplished nothing in this case, we need not enlarge upon his proceedings.

All that day Mr Bessel's whereabouts eluded an unceasingly active inquiry, and all that night. And all that day there was a persuasion in the back of Mr Vincent's mind that Mr. Bessel sought his attention, and all through the night Mr Bessel with a tear-stained face of anguish pursued him through his dreams. And whenever he saw Mr. Bessel in his dreams he also saw a number of other faces, vague but malignant, that seemed to be pursuing Mr. Bessel.

It was on the following day, Sunday, that Mr Vincent thought of the remarkable stories of Mrs Bullock, the medium, who was then attracting attention for the first time in London. He determined to consult her. She was stopping at the house of that well-known inquirer, Dr. Wilson Paget, and Mr Vincent, although he had never met that gentleman before, repaired to him forthwith with the intention of invoking her help. But scarcely had he mentioned the name of Bessel when Doctor Paget interrupted him. "Last night—just at the end," he said, "we had a communication."

"HOW DID YOU GET THIS?" SAID MR VINCENT."

He left the room, and returned with a slate on which were certain words written in a handwriting, shaky indeed, but indisputably the handwriting of Mr Bessel!

"How did you get this?" said Mr Vincent. "Do you mean——?"

"We got it last night," said Doctor Paget. With numerous interruptions from Mr Vincent, he proceeded to explain how the writing had been obtained. It appears that in her *séances*, Mrs Bullock passes into a condition of trance, her eyes rolling up in a strange way under her eyelids, and her body becoming rigid. She then begins to talk very rapidly, usually in voices other than her own. At the same time one or both of her hands may become active, and if slates and pencils are provided they will then write messages simultaneously with and quite independently of the flow of words from her mouth. By many she is considered an even more remarkable medium than the celebrated Mrs Piper. It was one of these messages, the one written by her left hand, that Mr Vincent now had before him. It consisted of eight words written disconnectedly "George Bessel . . . . trial excav^n. . . . . Baker Street . . . help . . . . starvation." Curiously enough, neither Doctor Paget nor the two other inquirers who were present had heard of the disappearance of Mr. Bessel—the news of it appeared only in the evening papers of Saturday—and they had put the message aside with many others of a vague and enigmatical sort that Mrs Bullock has from time to time delivered.

When Doctor Paget heard Mr Vincent's story, he gave himself at once with great energy to the pursuit of this clue to the discovery of Mr. Bessel. It would serve no useful purpose here to describe the inquiries of Mr Vincent and himself; suffice it that the clue was a genuine one, and that Mr Bessel was actually discovered by its aid.

He was found at the bottom of a detached shaft which had been sunk and abandoned at the commencement of the work for the new electric railway near Baker Street Station. His arm and leg and two ribs were broken. The shaft is protected by a hoarding nearly 20ft. high, and over this, incredible as it seems, Mr Bessel, a stout, middle-aged gentleman, must have scrambled in order to fall down the shaft. He was saturated in colza oil, and the smashed tin lay beside him, but luckily the flame had been extinguished by his fall. And his

madness had passed from him altogether. But he was, of course, terribly enfeebled, and at the sight of his rescuers he gave way to hysterical weeping.

In view of the deplorable state of his flat, he was taken to the house of Dr Hatton in Upper Baker Street. Here he was subjected to a sedative treatment, and anything that might recall the violent crisis through which he had passed was carefully avoided. But on the second day he volunteered a statement.

Since that occasion Mr Bessel has at several times repeated this statement—to myself among other people—varying the details as the narrator of real experiences always does, but never by any chance contradicting himself in any particular. And the statement he makes is in substance as follows.

In order to understand it clearly it is necessary to go back to his experiments with Mr Vincent before his remarkable attack. Mr Bessel's first attempts at self-projection, in his experiments with Mr Vincent, were, as the reader will remember, unsuccessful. But through all of them he was concentrating all his power and will upon getting out of the body—"willing it with all my might," he says. At last, almost against expectation, came success. And Mr Bessel asserts that he, being alive, did actually, by an effort of will, leave his body and pass into some place or state outside this world.

"I WAS A GREAT CLOUD ANCHORED TO MY BODY."

The release was, he asserts, instantaneous. "At one moment I was seated in my chair, with my eyes tightly shut, my hands gripping the arms of the chair, doing all I could to concentrate my mind on Vincent, and then I perceived myself outside my body—saw my body near me, but certainly not containing me, with the hands relaxing and the head drooping forward on the breast."

Nothing shakes him in his assurance of that release. He describes in a quiet, matter-of-fact way the new sensation he experienced. He felt he had become impalpable—so much he had expected, but he had not expected to find himself enormously large. So, however, it would seem he became. "I was a great cloud—if I may express it that way—anchored to my body. It appeared to me, at first, as if I had discovered a greater self of which the conscious being in my brain was only a little part. I saw the Albany and Piccadilly and Regent Street and all the rooms and places in the houses, very minute and very bright and distinct, spread out below me like a little city seen from a balloon. Every now and then vague shapes like drifting wreaths of smoke made the vision a little indistinct, but at first I paid little heed to them. The thing that astonished me most, and which astonishes me still, is that I saw quite distinctly the insides of the houses as well as the streets, saw little people dining and talking in the private houses, men and women dining, playing billiards, and drinking in restaurants and hotels, and several places of entertainment crammed with people. It was like watching the affairs of a glass hive."

Such were Mr Bessel's exact words as I took them down when he told me the story. Quite forgetful of Mr Vincent, he remained for a space observing these things. Impelled by curiosity, he says, he stooped down, and with the shadowy arm he found himself possessed of attempted to touch a man walking along Vigo Street. But he could not do so, though his finger seemed to pass through the man. Something prevented his doing this, but what it was he finds it hard to describe. He compares the obstacle to a sheet of glass.

"I felt as a kitten may feel," he said, "when it goes for the first time to pat its reflection in a mirror." Again and again, on the occasion when I heard him tell this story, Mr Bessel returned to that comparison of

the sheet of glass. Yet it was not altogether a precise comparison, because, as the reader will speedily see, there were interruptions of this generally impermeable resistance, means of getting through the barrier to the material world again. But, naturally, there is a very great difficulty in expressing these unprecedented impressions in the language of everyday experience.

A thing that impressed him instantly, and which weighed upon him throughout all this experience, was the stillness of this place—he was in a world without sound.

At first Mr. Bessel's mental state was an unemotional wonder. His thought chiefly concerned itself with where he might be. He was out of the body—out of his material body, at any rate—but that was not all. He believes, and I for one believe also, that he was somewhere out of space, as we understand it, altogether. By a strenuous effort of will he had passed out of his body into a world beyond this world, a world undreamt of, yet lying so close to it and so strangely situated with regard to it that all things on this earth are clearly visible both from without and from within in this other world about us. For a long time, as it seemed to him, this realization occupied his mind to the exclusion of all other matters, and then he recalled the engagement with Mr. Vincent, to which this astonishing experience was, after all, but a prelude.

"NEVER A SOUND FROM THE MOUTHS THAT SEEMED TO GIBBER."

He turned his mind to locomotion in this new body in which he found himself. For a time he was unable to shift himself from his attachment to his earthly carcass. For a time this new strange cloud body of his simply swayed, contracted, expanded, coiled, and writhed with his efforts to free himself, and then quite suddenly the link that bound him snapped. For a moment everything was hidden by what appeared to be whirling spheres of dark vapour, and then through a momentary gap he saw his drooping body collapse limply, saw his lifeless head drop sideways, and found he was driving along like a huge cloud in a strange place of shadowy clouds that had the luminous intricacy of London spread like a model below.

But now he was aware that the fluctuating vapour about him was something more than vapour, and the temerarious excitement of his first essay was shot with fear. For he perceived, at first indistinctly, and then suddenly very clearly, that he was surrounded by *faces!* that each roll and coil of the seeming cloud-stuff was a face. And such faces! Faces of thin shadow, faces of gaseous tenuity. Faces like those faces that glare with intolerable strangeness upon the sleeper in the evil hours of his dreams. Evil, greedy eyes that were full of a covetous curiosity, faces with knit brows and snarling, smiling lips, their vague hands clutched at Mr. Bessel as he passed, and the rest of their bodies was but an elusive streak of trailing darkness. Never a word they said, never a sound from the mouths that seemed to gibber. All about him they pressed in that dreamy silence, passing freely through the dim misuness that was his body, gathering ever more numerously about him. And the shadowy Mr. Bessel, now suddenly fear-stricken, drove through the silent, active multitude of eyes and clutching hands.

So inhuman were these faces, so malignant their staring eyes, and shadowy, clawing gestures, that it did not occur to Mr. Bessel to attempt intercourse with these drifting creatures. Idiot phantoms, they seemed, children of vain desire, beings unborn and forbidden the boon of being, whose only expressions and gestures told of the envy and

craving for life that was their one link with existence.

It says much for his resolution that, amidst the swarming cloud of these noiseless spirits of evil, he could still think of Mr. Vincent. He made a violent effort of will and found himself, he knew not how, stooping towards Staple Inn, saw Vincent sitting attentive and alert in his arm chair by the fire.

And clustering also about him, as they clustered ever about all that lives and breathes, was another multitude of these vain, voiceless shadows, longing, desiring, seeking some loophole into life.

For a space Mr. Bessel sought ineffectually to attract his friend's attention. He tried to get in front of his eyes, to move the objects in his room, to touch him. But Mr. Vincent remained unmoved, ignorant of the being that was so close to his own. The strange something that Mr. Bessel has compared to a sheet of glass separated them impermeably.

And at last Mr. Bessel did a desperate thing. I have told how that in some strange way he could see not only the outside of a man as we see him, but within. He extended his shadowy hand and thrust his vague black fingers, as it seemed, through the heedless brain.

Then, suddenly, Mr. Vincent started like a man who recalls his attention from wandering thoughts, and it seemed to Mr. Bessel that a little dark red body situated in the middle of Mr. Vincent's brain swelled and glowed as he did so. Since that experience he has been shown anatomical figures of the brain, and he knows now that this is that useless structure, as doctors call it, the pineal eye. For, strange as it will seem to many, we have, deep in our brains—where it cannot possibly see any earthly light—an eye! At the time this, with the rest of the internal anatomy of the brain, was quite new to him. At the sight of its changed appearance, however, he thrust forth his finger and, rather fearful still of the consequences, touched this little spot. And instantly Mr. Vincent started, and Mr. Bessel knew that he was seen.

And at that instant it came to Mr. Bessel that evil had happened to his body, and behold! a great wind blew through all that world of shadows and bore him away. So strong was this persuasion, that he thought no more of Mr. Vincent, but turned about forthwith, and all the countless faces drove back with him like leaves before a gale. But he returned too late. In an instant he saw the body that he had left inert and collapsed—lying, indeed, like the body of a man just dead—had arisen, had arisen by virtue of some strength and will beyond his own. It stood with staring eyes, stretching its limbs in dubious fashion.

For a moment he watched it in wild dismay, and then he stooped towards it. But the pane of glass had closed against him again, and he was foiled. He beat himself passionately against this, and all about him the spirits of evil grinned and pointed and mocked. He gave way to furious anger. He compares himself to a bird that has fluttered heedlessly into a room and is beating at the window-pane that holds it back from freedom.

And behold! the little body that had once been his was now dancing with delight. He saw it shouting, though he could not hear its shouts; he saw the violence of its movements grow. He watched it fling his cherished furniture about in the mad delight of existence, rend his books apart, smash bottles, drink heedlessly from the jagged fragments, leap and smite in a passionate acceptance of living. He watched these actions in paralyzed astonishment. Then once more he hurled himself against the impassable barrier, and then, with all that crew of mocking ghosts about him, hurried back in dire confusion to Vincent to tell him of the outrage that had come upon him.

But the brain of Vincent was now closed against apparitions, and the disembodied Mr. Bessel pursued him in vain as he hurried out into Holborn to call a cab. Foiled and terror-stricken, Mr. Bessel swept back again, to find his desecrated body whooping in a glorious frenzy down the Burlington Arcade . . . .

And now the attentive reader begins to understand Mr. Bessel's interpretation of the first part of this strange story. The being whose frantic rush through London had inflicted so much injury and disaster had indeed Mr. Bessel's body, but it was not Mr. Bessel. It was an evil spirit out of that strange world beyond existence, into which Mr. Bessel had so rashly ventured. For twenty hours it held possession of him, and for all those twenty hours the dispossessed spirit-body of Mr. Bessel was going to and fro in that unheard of middle world of shadows seeking help in vain.

He spent many hours beating at the minds of Mr. Vincent and of his friend Mr. Hartleigh, as we know, he roused by his efforts. But the language that might convey his situation to these helpers across the gulf he did

not know; his feeble fingers groped vainly and powerlessly in their brains. Once, indeed, as we have already told, he was able to turn Mr Vincent aside from his path so that he encountered the stolen body in its career, but he could not make him understand the thing that had happened: he was unable to draw any help from that encounter . . .

All through those hours the persuasion was overwhelming in Mr. Bessel's mind that presently the body would be killed by its furious tenant, and he would have to remain in this shadow-land for evermore. So that those long hours were a growing agony of fear. And ever as he hurried to and fro in his ineffectual excitement innumerable spirits of that world about him mobbed him and confused his mind. And ever an envious applauding multitude poured after their successful fellow as he went upon his glorious career.

"INNUMERABLE SPIRITS MOBBED HIM."

For that, it would seem, must be the life of these bodiless things of this world that is the shadow of our world. Ever they watch, coveting a way into a mortal body, in order that they may descend, as furies and frenzies, as violent lusts and mad, strange impulses, rejoicing in the body they have won. For Mr. Bessel was not the only human soul in that place. Witness the fact that he met first one, and afterwards several shadows of men, men like himself, it seemed, who had lost their bodies even it may be as he had lost his, and wandered, despairingly, in that lost world that is neither life nor death. They could not speak because that world is silent, yet he knew them for men because of their dim human bodies, and because of the sadness of their faces.

But how they had come into that world he could not tell, nor where the bodies they had lost might be, whether they still raved about the earth, or whether they were closed for ever in death against return. That they were the spirits of the dead neither he nor I believe. But Doctor Wilson Paget thinks they are the rational souls of men who are lost in madness on the earth.

At last Mr. Bessel chanced upon a place where a little crowd of such disembodied silent creatures was gathered, and thrusting through them he saw below a brightly-lit room, and four or five quiet gentlemen and a woman, a stoutish woman dressed in black bombazine and sitting awkwardly in a chair with her head thrown back. He knew her from her portraits to be Mrs. Bullock, the medium. And he perceived that tracts and structures in her brain glowed and stirred as he had seen the pineal eye in the brain of Mr Vincent glow. The light was very fitful: sometimes it was a broad illumination, and sometimes merely a faint twilight spot, and it shifted slowly about her brain. She kept on talking and writing with one hand. And Mr Bessel saw that the crowding shadows of men about him, and a great multitude of the shadow spirits of that shadow land, were all striving and thrusting to touch the lighted regions of her brain. As one gained her brain or another was thrust away, her voice and the writing of her hand changed. So that what she said was disorderly and confused for the most part; now a fragment of one soul's message, and now a fragment of another's, and now she babbled the insane fancies of the spirits of vain desire. Then Mr Bessel understood that she spoke for the spirit that had touch of

her, and he began to struggle very furiously towards her. But he was on the outside of the crowd and at that time he could not reach her, and at last, growing anxious, he went away to find what had happened meanwhile to his body.

For a long time he went to and fro seeking it in vain and fearing that it must have been killed, and then he found it at the bottom of the shaft in Baker Street, writhing furiously and cursing with pain. Its leg and an arm and two ribs had been broken by its fall. Moreover, the evil spirit was angry because his time had been so short and because of the pain—making violent movements and casting his body about.

And at that Mr. Bessel returned with redoubled earnestness to the room where the *séance* was going on, and so soon as he had thrust himself within sight of the place he saw one of the men who stood about the medium looking at his watch as if he meant that the *séance* should presently end. At that a great number of the shadows who had been striving turned away with gestures of despair. But the thought that the *séance* was almost over only made Mr. Bessel the more earnest, and he struggled so stoutly with his will against the others that presently he gained the woman's brain. It chanced that just at that moment it glowed very brightly, and in that instant she wrote the message that Doctor Wilson Paget preserved. And then the other shadows and the cloud of evil spirits about him had thrust Mr. Bessel away from her, and for all the rest of the *séance* he could regain her no more.

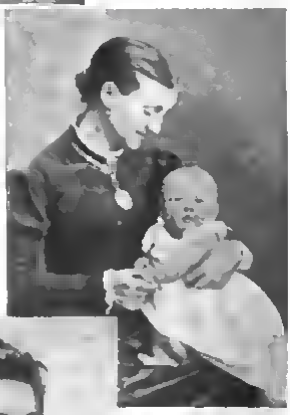
So he went back and watched through the long hours at the bottom of the shaft where the evil spirit lay in the stolen body it had maimed, writhing and cursing, and weeping and groaning, and learning the lesson of pain. And towards dawn the thing he had waited for happened, and brain glowed brightly and the evil spirit came out, and Mr. Bessel entered the body he had feared he should never enter again. As he did so, the silence — the brooding silence — ended, he heard the tumult of traffic and the voices of people overhead, and that strange world that is the shadow of our world — the dark and silent shadows of desire and the shadows of lost men—vanished clean away.

He lay there for the space of about three hours before he was found. And in spite of the pain and suffering of his wounds, and of the dim, damp place in which he lay, in spite of the tears—wrung from him by his physical distress—his heart was full of gladness to know that he was nevertheless back once more in the kindly world of men.

Portraits of Celebrities at Different Times of their Lives.

MRS L T MEADE

WE are sure that our readers will be glad to avail themselves of this opportunity of a closer acquaintance with Mrs Meade, the well known novelist, and one of the most popular contributors to THE STRAND MAGAZINE. For seventeen years Mrs Meade has been one of the most industrious modern writers of fiction. She was born in the county of Cork, where her father, a clergyman, held a living, and it is here that she first developed her strong inclination towards literature. "Great St. Benedicts" and "Scamp and I" were her first books, and they were very successful, the latter especially, being translated into many languages. Since then she has worked at the rate of four or five volumes a year. Mrs. Meade is represented by a story in the present number, while "The Brotherhood of the Seven Kings" is too recent in the memory of our readers to need mention here.



AGE 3½
From a Daguerreotype.

MR H. G. WELLS

BORN 1866

WE have pleasure in presenting our readers with a set of portraits of one of the most individual and attractive of the younger generation of writers Mr. H. G. Wells is the son of Mr. Joseph Wells, and was

AGE 9.
From a Daguerreotype.

born in Bromley, Kent. He began his education at a private school in Bromley, afterwards entering the Midhurst Grammar School, and completing his education at the Royal College of Science. For some years he acted as a science master in a private school, and in 1890 became a coach for the London University Examinations. After a severe illness in 1893, however, he took to journalism, and is now a universal favourite as a writer of stories in which science and imagination are united in a manner all his own. The publication of Mr Wells's first book, "The Time Machine," made it evident that a writer with a new gift had appeared in the world of literature, and

AGE 13.
From a Daguerreotype.

AGE 24.
From a Photo by Frank Dickins, Sloane Street.

this conclusion has since been amply confirmed by the publication of "The Wonderful Visit," "The Wheels of Chance," and "The War of the Worlds." Mr Wells is at present writing a series of stories for this Magazine, of which two have already appeared, and which promise to show his powers at their highest mark

PRESENT DAY
From a Photo. by Mr Onno Rose.

ROBERT BARR

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BERTRAM EASTFORD had intended to pass the shop of his old friend, the curiosity dealer, into whose pocket so much of his money had gone for trinkets gathered from all quarters of the globe. He knew it was weakness on his part to select that street when he might have taken another, but he thought it would do no harm to treat himself to one glance at the seductive window of the old curiosity shop, where the dealer was in the habit of displaying his latest acquisitions. The window was never quite the same, and it had a continued fascination for Bertram Eastford; but this time, he said to himself resolutely, he would not enter, having, as he assured himself, the strength of mind to forgo this temptation. However, he reckoned without his window, for in it there was an old object newly displayed which caught his attention as effectually as a half-driven nail arrests the hem of a cloak. On the central shelf of the window stood an hour-glass, its framework of some wood as black as ebony. He stood gazing at it for a moment, then turned to the door and went inside, greeting the ancient shopman, whom he knew so well.

"I want to look at the hour-glass you have in the window," he said.

"Ah, yes," replied the curiosity dealer; "the cheap watch has driven the hour glass out of the commercial market, and we rarely pick up a thing like that nowadays."

He took the hour-glass from the shelf in the window, reversed it, and placed it on a table. The ruddy sand began to pour through into the lower receptacle in a thin, constant stream, as if it were blood that had been dried and powdered. Eastford watched the ever-increasing heap at the bottom, rising conically, changing its shape every moment, as little avalanches of the sand fell away from its heightening sides.

"There is no need for you to extol its antiquity," said Eastford, with a smile. "I knew the moment I looked at it that such glasses are rare, and you are not going to find me a cheapening customer."

"So far from over-praising it," protested the shopman, "I was about to call your attention to a defect. It is useless as a measurer of time."

"It doesn't record the exact hour, then?" asked Eastford.

"Well, I suppose the truth is, they were not very particular in the old days, and time was not money, as it is now. It measures the hour with great accuracy," the curio dealer went on "that is, if you watch it; but, strangely enough, after it has run for half an hour, or thereabouts, through some defect in the neck of the glass, or in the pulverizing of the sand, it stops, and will not go again unless the glass is shaken."

The hour glass at that moment verified what the old man said. The tiny stream of sand suddenly ceased, but went on again the moment its owner jarred the frame, and continued pouring without interruption.

"That is very singular," said Eastford. "How do you account for it?"

"I imagine it is caused by some inequality in the grains of sand, probably a few atoms larger than the others come together at the neck, and so stop the percolation. It always does it and, of course, I cannot remedy the matter because the glass is hermetically sealed."

"Well, I don't want it as a timekeeper, so we will not allow that defect to interfere with the sale. How much do you ask for it?"

The dealer named his price, and Eastford paid the amount asked.

"I shall send it to you this afternoon."

"Thank you," said the customer, taking his leave.

That night in his room Bertram Eastford wrote busily until a late hour. When his work was concluded, he pushed away his manuscript with a sigh of that deep contentment which comes to a man who has not wasted his day. He replenished his open fire, drew his most comfortable arm-chair in front of it, took the green shade from his lamp, thus filling the luxurious apartment with a light that was reflected from armour and from ancient weapons standing in corners and hung along the walls. He lifted the paper-covered package, cut the string that bound it, and placed the ancient hour-glass on his table, watching the thin stream of sand which his action had set running. The constant, unceasing, steady downfall seemed to hypnotize him. Its descent was as silent as the footsteps of time itself. Suddenly it stopped, as it had done in the shop, and its abrupt ceasing jarred on his tingling nerves like an unexpected break in the stillness. He could almost imagine an unseen hand clasping the thin cylinder of the glass and throttling it. He shook the bygone time-measurer and breathed again more steadily when the sand resumed its motion. Presently he took the glass from the table and examined it with some attention. He thought at first its frame was ebony, but further inspection convinced him it was oak, blackened with age. On one round end was carved rudely two hearts overlapping, and twined about them a pair of serpents.

"Now, I wonder what that's for?" murmured Eastford to himself. "An attempt at a coat of arms, perhaps."

There was no clue to the meaning of the hieroglyphics, and Eastford, with the glass balanced on his knee, watched the sand still running, the crimson thread sparkling in the lamplight. He fancied he saw distorted reflections of faces in the convex glass, although his reason told him they were but caricatures of his own. The great bell in the tower near by, with slow solemnity, tolled twelve. He counted its measured strokes one by one, and then was startled by a decisive knock at his door. One section of his brain considered this visit untimely, another looked on it as perfectly usual, and while the two were arguing the matter out, he heard his own voice cry: "Come in."

The door opened, and the discussion between the government and the opposition in his mind ceased to consider the untimeliness of the visit, for here, in the visitor himself, stood another problem. He was a young man in military costume, his uniform being that of an officer. Eastford remembered seeing something like it on the stage, and knowing little of military affairs, thought perhaps the costume of the visitor before him indicated an officer in the Napoleonic war.

"Good evening!" said the incomer. "May I introduce myself? I am Lieutenant Sentore, of the regular army."

"THE VISITOR."

"You are very welcome," returned his host. "Will you be seated?"

"Thank you, no. I have but a few moments to stay. I have come for my hour-glass, if you will be good enough to let me have it."

"Your hour-glass?" ejaculated Eastford, in surprise. "I think you labour under a misapprehension. The glass belongs to me; I bought it to-day at the old curiosity shop in Finchmore Street."

"I admit that, technically, rightful possession of the glass rests with you, but taking you to be a gentleman, I venture to believe that a mere statement of my priority of claim will appeal to you, even though it might have no effect on the minds of a jury of our countrymen"

"You mean to say that the glass has been stolen from you and has been sold?"

"It has been sold undoubtedly over and over again, but never stolen, so far as I have been able to trace its history"

"If, then, the glass has been honestly purchased by its different owners, I fail to see how you can possibly establish any claim to it."

"I have already admitted that my claim is moral rather than legal," continued the visitor "It is a long story; have I your permission to tell it?"

"I shall be delighted to listen," replied Eastford, "but before doing so I beg to renew my invitation, and ask you to occupy this easy chair before the fire."

The officer bowed in silence, crossed the room behind Eastford, and sat down in the arm-chair, placing his sword across his knees. The stranger spread his hands before the fire, and seemed to enjoy the comforting warmth. He remained for a few moments buried in deep reflection, quite ignoring the presence of his host, who, glancing upon the hour-glass in dispute upon his knee, seeing that the sands had all run out, silently reversed it and set them running again This action caught the corner of the stranger's eye, and brought him to a realization of why he was there. Drawing a heavy sigh, he began his story.

"In the year 1706 I held the post of lieutenant in that part of the British Army commanded by General Trelawny, the supreme command, of course, being in the hands of the great Marlborough."

Eastford listened to this announcement with the idea that there was something absurd about the statement. The man sitting there was calmly talking of a time one hundred and ninety-two years past, and yet he himself could not be a day more than twenty-five years old. Somewhere entangled in this were the elements of absurdity. Eastford found himself unable to unravel them, but the more he thought of the matter, the more reasonable it began to appear, and so, hoping his visitor had not noted the look of surprise on his face, he said, quietly, casting his mind back over the history of England, and remembering what he had learned at school

"That was during the war of the Spanish Succession?"

"Yes; the war had then been in progress four years, and many brilliant victories had been won, the greatest of which was probably the Battle of Blenheim"

"Quite so," murmured Eastford

"It was the English," Casper cried,
"That put the French to rout;
But what they killed each other for,
I never could make out"

The officer looked up in astonishment

"I never heard anything like that said about the war. The reason for it was perfectly plain. We had to fight or acknowledge France to be the dictator of Europe. Still, politics have nothing to do with my story. General Trelawny and his forces were in Brabant, and were under orders to join the Duke of Marlborough's army We were to go through the country as speedily as possible, for a great battle was expected Trelawny's instructions were to capture certain towns and cities that lay in our way, to dismantle the fortresses, and to parole their garrisons. We could not encumber ourselves with prisoners, and so marched the garrisons out, patolled them, destroyed their arms, and bade them disperse But, great as was our hurry, strict orders had been given to leave no strong holds in our rear untaken.

"Everything went well until we came to the town of Elsengore, which we captured without the loss of a man The capture of the town, however, was of little avail, for in the centre of it stood a strong citadel, which we tried to take by assault, but could not General Trelawny, a very irascible, hot headed man, but, on the whole, a just and capable officer, impatient at this unexpected delay, offered the garrison almost any terms they desired to evacuate the castle But, having had warning of our coming, they had provisioned the place, were well supplied with ammunition, and their commander refused to make terms with General Trelawny

"'If you want the place,' said the Frenchman, 'come and take it.'

"General Trelawny, angered at this contemptuous treatment, flung his men again and again at the citadel, but without making the slightest impression on it.

"We were in no wise prepared for a long siege, nor had we expected stubborn resistance. Marching quickly, as was our custom heretofore, we possessed no heavy artillery, and so were at a disadvantage when attacking a fortress as strong as that of Elsengore. Meanwhile, General Trelawny sent mounted messengers by different roads to his chief, giving an account of what had happened, explaining his delay in joining the main army, and asking for definite instructions. He expected that one or two, at least, of the mounted messengers sent away every day would reach his chief and be enabled to return. And that is exactly what happened, for one day a dusty horseman came to General Trelawny's head quarters with a brief note from Marlborough. The Commander in Chief said:—

"'I think the Frenchman's advice is good. We want the place; therefore, take it.'

"But he sent no heavy artillery to aid us in this task, for he could not spare his big guns, expecting, as he did, an important battle. General Trelawny having his work thus cut out for him, settled down to accomplish it as best he might. He quartered officers and men in various parts of the town, the more thoroughly to keep watch on the citizens, of whose good intentions, if the siege were prolonged, we were by no means sure.

"It fell to my lot to be lodged in the house of Burgomaster Seidelmier, of whose conduct I have no reason to complain, for he treated me well. I was given two rooms, one a large, low apartment on the first floor, and communicating directly with the outside, by means of a hall and a separate stairway. The room was lighted by a long, many-paned window, leaded and filled with diamond-shaped glass. Beyond this large drawing-room was my bedroom. I must say that I enjoyed my stay in Burgomaster Seidelmier's house, none the less because he had an only daughter, a most charming girl. Our acquaintance ripened into deep friendship, and afterwards into —but that has nothing to do with what I have to tell you. My story is of war, and not of love. Gretlich Seidelmier presented me with the hour-glass you have in your hand, and on it I carved the joined hearts entwined with our similar initials."

"So they are initials, are they?" said Eastford, glancing down at what he had mistaken for twining serpents.

"Yes," said the officer. "I was more accustomed to a sword than to an etching tool, and the letters are but rudely drawn. One evening, after dark, Gretlich and I were whispering together in the hall, when we heard the heavy tread of the general coming up the stair. The girl fled precipitately, and I, holding open the door, waited the approach

"LIEUTENANT," HE SAID, "IT IS MY INTENTION TO CAPTURE THE CITADEL TO-NIGHT."

of my chief. He entered and curtly asked me to close the door.

"'Lieutenant,' he said, 'it is my intention to capture the citadel to-night. Get together twenty-five of your men, and have them ready under the shadow of this house, but give no one a hint of what you intend to do with them. In one hour's time leave this place as quietly as possible, and make an attack on the western entrance of the citadel. Your attack is to be but a feint and to draw off their forces to that point. Still, if any of your men succeed in gaining entrance to the fort they shall not lack reward and promotion. Have you a watch?'

"'Not one that will go, general; but I have an hour-glass here.'

"'Very well, set it running. Collect your men, and exactly at the hour lead them to the west front, it is but five minutes' quick march from here. An hour and five minutes from this moment I expect you to begin the attack, and the instant you are before the western gate make as much noise as your twenty five men are capable of, so as to lead the enemy to believe that the attack is a serious one.'

"Saying this, the general turned and made his way, heavy footed, through the hall and down the stairway.

"I set the hour-glass running, and went at once to call my men, stationing them where I had been ordered to place them. I returned to have a word with Gretlich before I departed on what I knew was a dangerous mission. Glancing at the hour-glass, I saw that not more than a quarter of the sand had run down during my absence. I remained in the doorway, where I could keep an eye on the hour glass, while the girl stood leaning her arm against the angle of the dark passage-way, supporting her fair cheek on her open palm; and, standing thus in the darkness, she talked to me in whispers. We talked and talked, engaged in that sweet, endless conversation that murmurs in subdued tone round the world, being duplicated that moment at who knows how many places. Absorbed as I was in listening, at last there crept into my consciousness the fact that the sand in the upper bulb was not diminishing as fast as it should. This knowledge was fully in my mind for some time before I realized its fearful significance. Suddenly the dim knowledge took on actuality. I sprang from the door-lintel, saying:—

"'Good heavens, the sand in the hour-glass has stopped running!'

"I remained there motionless, all action struck from my rigid limbs, gazing at the hour glass on the table. Gretlich, peering in at the doorway, and looking at the hour glass and not at me, having no suspicion of the ruin involved in the stoppage of that mintature sand storm, said, presently —

"'Oh, yes, I forgot to tell you it does that now and then, and so you must shake the glass.'

"She bent forward as if to do this when the leaden windows shuddered, and the house itself trembled with the sharp crash of our light cannon, followed almost immediately by the deeper detonation of the heavier guns from the citadel. The red sand in the glass began to fall again, and its liberation seemed to unfetter my paralyzed limbs. Bareheaded as I was, I rushed like one frantic along the passage and down the stairs. The air was resonant with the quick following reports of the cannon, and the long, narrow street was fitfully lit up as if by sudden flashes of

"I REMAINED THERE MOTIONLESS, GAZING AT THE HOUR GLASS.

summer lightning. My men were still standing where I had placed them. Giving a sharp word of command, I marched them down the street and out into the square, where I met General Trelawny coming back from his futile assault. Like myself, he was bareheaded. His military countenance was begrimed with powder-smoke, but he spoke to me with no trace of anger in his voice.

"'Lieutenant Sentore,' he said, 'disperse your men.'

"I gave the word to disband my men, and then stood at attention before him.

"'Lieutenant Sentore,' he said, in the same level voice, 'return to your quarters and consider yourself under arrest. Await my coming there.'

"I turned and obeyed his orders. It seemed incredible that the sand should still be running in the hour-glass, for ages had passed over my head since last I was in that room. I paced up and down, awaiting the coming of my chief, feeling neither fear nor regret, but rather dumb despair. In a few minutes his heavy tread was on the stair, followed by the measured tramp of a file of men. He came into the room, and with him were a sergeant and four soldiers, fully armed. The general was trembling with rage, but held strong control over himself, as was his habit on serious occasions.

"'Lieutenant Sentore,' he said, 'why were you not at your post?'

"'The running sand in the hour-glass' (I hardly recognised my own voice on hearing it) 'stopped when but half exhausted. I did not notice its interruption until it was too late.'

"The general glanced grimly at the hour-glass. The last sands were falling through to the lower bulb. I saw that he did not believe my explanation.

"'It seems now to be in perfect working order,' he said, at last.

"He strode up to it and reversed it, watching the sand pour for a few moments, then he spoke abruptly:—

"'Lieutenant Sentore, your sword.'

"I handed my weapon to him without a word. Turning to the sergeant, he said: 'Lieutenant Sentore is sentenced to death. He has an hour for whatever preparations he cares to make. Allow him to dispose of that hour as he chooses, so long as he remains within this room and holds converse with no one whatever. When the last sands of this hour-glass are run, Lieutenant Sentore will stand at the other end of this room and meet the death merited by traitors, laggards, or cowards. Do you understand your duty, sergeant?'

"'Yes, general.'

"General Trelawny abruptly left the room, and we heard his heavy steps echoing throughout the silent house, and later more faintly on the cobble-stones of the street. When they had died away a deep stillness set in, I standing alone at one end of the room, my eyes fixed on the hour-glass, and the sergeant with his four men, like statues at the other, also gazing at the same sinister object. The sergeant was the first to break the silence.

"'Lieutenant,' he said, 'do you wish to write anything——?'

"He stopped short, being an unready man, rarely venturing far beyond 'Yes' and 'No.'

"'I should like to communicate with one in this household,' I said, 'but the general has forbidden it, so all I ask is that you shall have my body conveyed from this room as speedily as possible after the execution.'

"'Very good, lieutenant,' answered the sergeant.

"After that, for a long time no word was spoken. I watched my life run redly through the wasp waist of the transparent glass, then suddenly the sand ceased to flow, half in the upper bulb, half in the lower.

"'It has stopped,' said the sergeant, 'I must shake the glass.'

"'Stand where you are!' I commanded, sharply. 'Your orders do not run to that.'

"The habit of obedience rooted the sergeant to the spot.

"'Send one of your men to General Trelawny,' I said, as if I had still the right to be obeyed. 'Tell him what has happened, and ask for instructions. Let your man tread lightly as he leaves the room.'

"The sergeant did not hesitate a moment, but gave the order I required of him. The soldier nearest the door tip-toed out of the house. Probably more than half an hour passed, during which time no man moved, the sergeant and his three remaining soldiers seemed afraid to breathe, then we heard the step of the general himself on the stair. I feared that this would give the needed impetus to the sand in the glass, but, when Trelawny entered, the *status quo* remained. The general stood looking at the suspended sand, without speaking.

"'That is what happened before, general, and that is why I was not at my place. I have committed the crime of neglect, and have thus deservedly earned my death; but

I shall die the happier if my general believes I am neither a traitor nor a coward.'

"The general, still without a word, advanced to the table, slightly shook the hour-glass, and the sand began to pour again. Then he picked it up in his hand, examining it minutely, as if it were some strange kind of toy, turning it over and over. He glanced up at me and said, quite in his usual tone, as if nothing in particular had come between us —

"'Remarkable thing that, Sentore, isn't it?'

"'Very,' I answered, grimly.

"He put the glass down

"'Sergeant, take your men to quarters. Lieutenant Sentore, I return to you your sword; you can perhaps make better use of it alive than dead. I am not a man to be disobeyed, reason or no reason. Remember that, and now go to bed.'

"He left me without further word, and buckling on my sword, I proceeded straightway to disobey again

"HE PICKED IT UP IN HIS HAND, EXAMINING IT MINUTELY"

"I had a great liking for General Trelawny. Knowing how he fumed and raged at being thus held helpless by an apparently impregnable fortress in the unimportant town of Elsengore, I had myself studied the citadel from all points, and had come to the conclusion that it might be successfully attempted, not by the great gates that opened on the square of the town, nor by the inferior west gates, but by scaling the seemingly unclimbable cliffs at the north side. The wall at the top of this precipice was low, and owing to the height of the beetling cliff, was inefficiently watched by one lone sentinel, who paced the battlements from corner tower to corner tower. I had made my plans, intending to ask the general's permission to risk this venture, but now I resolved to try it without his knowledge or consent, and thus retrieve, if I could, my failure of the foregoing part of the night.

"Taking with me a long, thin rope which I had in my room, anticipating such a trial for it, I roused five of my picked men, and silently we made our way to the foot of the northern cliff. Here, with the rope around my waist, I worked my way diagonally up along a cleft in the rock, which, like others parallel to it, marked the face of the precipice. A slip would be fatal. The loosening of a stone would give warning to the sentinel, whose slow steps I heard on the wall above me, but at last I reached a narrow ledge without accident, and standing up in the darkness, my chin was level with the top of the wall on which the sentry paced. The shelf between the bottom of the wall and the top of the cliff was perhaps three feet in width, and gave ample room for a man careful of his footing. Aided by the rope, the others, less expert climbers than myself, made their way to my side one by one, and the six of us stood on the ledge under the low wall. We were all in our stockinged feet, some of the men, in fact, not even having stockings on. As the sentinel passed, we crouching in the darkness under the wall, the most agile of our party sprang up behind him. The soldier had taken off his jacket, and tip-toeing behind the sentinel, he threw the garment over his head, tightening it with a twist that almost strangled the man. Then seizing his

gun so that it would not clatter on the stones, held him thus helpless while we five climbed up beside him. Feeling under the jacket, I put my right hand firmly on the sentinel's throat, and nearly choking the breath out of him, said—

"'Your life depends on your actions now. Will you utter a sound if I let go your throat?'

"The man shook his head vehemently, and I released my clutch.

"'Now,' I said to him, 'where is the powder stored? Answer in a whisper, and speak truly.'

"'The bulk of the powder,' he answered, 'is in the vault below the citadel.'

"'Where is the rest of it?' I whispered.

"'In the lower room of the round tower by the gate.'

"'Nonsense,' I said; 'they would never store it in a place so liable to attack.'

"'There was nowhere else to put it,' replied the sentinel, 'unless they left it in the open courtyard, which would be quite as unsafe.'

"'Is the door to the lower room in the tower bolted?'

"'There is no door,' replied the sentry, 'but a low archway. This archway has not been closed, because no cannon-balls ever come from the northern side.'

"'How much powder is there in this room?'

"'I do not know; nine or ten barrels, I think.'

"It was evident to me that the fellow, in his fear, spoke the truth. Now, the question was, how to get down from the wall into the courtyard and across that to the archway at the southern side? Cautioning the sentinel again, that if he made the slightest attempt to escape or give the alarm, instant death

"HE HELD HIM HELPLESS WHILE WE FIVE CLIMBED UP BESIDE HIM."

would be meted to him, I told him to guide us to the archway, which he did, down the stone steps that led from the northern wall into the courtyard. They seemed to keep loose watch inside, the only sentinels in the place being those on the upper walls. But the man we had captured not appearing at his corner in time, his comrade on the western side became alarmed, spoke to him, and, obtaining no answer, shouted for him, then discharged his gun. Instantly the place was in an uproar. Lights flashed, and from different guard rooms soldiers poured out. I saw across the courtyard the archway the sentinel had spoken of, and calling my men made a dash for it. The besieged garrison, not expecting an enemy within, had been rushing up the stone steps at each side to the outer wall to man the cannon they had so recently quitted, and it was some minutes before a knowledge of the real state of things came to them. These few minutes were all we needed, but I saw there was no chance for a slow match, while if we fired the mine we probably would die under the tottering tower.

"By the time we reached the archway and found the powder barrels, the besieged, finding everything silent outside, came to a realization of the true condition of affairs. We faced them with bayonets fixed, while Sept, the man who had captured the sentinel, took the hatchet he had brought with him at his girdle, flung over one of the barrels on its side, knocked in the head of it, allowing the dull black powder to pour on the cobble-stones. Then filling his hat with the explosive, he came out towards us, leaving a thick trail behind him. By this time we were sorely beset, and one of our men had gone down under the fire of the enemy, who shot wildly, being baffled by the darkness, otherwise all of us had been slaughtered. I seized a musket from a comrade and shouted to the rest —

"'Save yourselves,' and to the garrison, in French, I gave the same warning; then I fired the musket into the train of powder, and next instant found myself half stunned and bleeding at the farther end of the courtyard. The roar of the explosion and the crash of the falling tower were deafening. All Elsengore was aroused by the earthquake shock. I called to my men when I could find my voice, and Sept answered from one side, and two more from another. Together we tottered across the *débris*-strewn courtyard. Some woodwork inside the citadel had taken fire and was burning fiercely, and this lit up the ruins and made visible the great gap in the wall at the fallen gate. Into the square below we saw the whole town pouring, soldiers and civilians alike coming from the narrow streets into the open quadrangle. I made my way, leaning on Sept, over the broken gate and down the causeway into the square, and there, foremost of all, met my general, with a cloak thrown round him, to make up for his want of coat.

"'There, general,' I gasped, 'there is your citadel, and through this gap can we march to meet Marlborough.'

"'Pray, sir, who the deuce are you?' cried the general, for my face was like that of a blackamoor.

"'I am the lieutenant who has once more disobeyed your orders, general, in the hope of retrieving a former mistake.'

"'Sentore!' he cried, rapping out an oath. 'I shall have you court-martialled, sir.'

"'I think, general,' I said, 'that I am court-martialled already,' for I thought then that the hand of death was upon me, which shows the effect of imagination, for my wounds were not serious, yet I sank down at the general's feet. He raised me in his arms as if I had been his own son, and thus carried me to my rooms. Seven years later, when the war ended, I got leave of absence and came back to Elsengore for Grethch Seidelmier and the hour-glass."

As the lieutenant ceased speaking, Eastford thought he heard again the explosion at the tower, and started to his feet in nervous alarm, then looked at the lieutenant and laughed, while he said —

"Lieutenant, I was startled by that noise just now, and imagined for the moment that I was in Brabant. You have made good your claim to the hour-glass, and you are welcome to it."

But as he spoke, he turned his eyes towards the chair in which the lieutenant had been seated, and found it vacant. Gazing round the room, in half somnolent dismay, he saw that he was indeed alone. At his feet was the shattered hour-glass, which had fallen from his knee, its blood-red sand mingling with the colours on the carpet. Eastford said, with an air of surprise —

"By Jove!"

WHERE THE AIR QUIVERED

By L. T. Meade
and
Robert Eustace.

WHEN my daughter Vivien became engaged to Archie Forbes I naturally took a great interest in the circumstance. Vivien was my only child, and her mother had died at her birth. She was a handsome, bright, sensible girl, worthy to be the wife of any good fellow, and with as much pluck and common sense as I have ever seen in anyone.

Archie was a landed proprietor on a small scale, and had not a debt in the world, his past was a clean record, and his future was as bright as health, intelligence, and a fair amount of money could make it. He was devotedly attached to Vivien, and I gave my hearty consent to the engagement.

I am a doctor by profession, and thoroughly enjoy the life. In the ordinary course of things the physician comes into close contact with the stranger and rarer forms of human nature, and being myself a lover of all that is out of the common, this outlook weighed with me in my choice. After many years of hard work I secured an enormous practice, and when I settled down as a specialist in Harley Street I was already a wealthy man.

On a certain warm evening in June I sat smoking at the open window of my dining-room when Vivien entered.

She held a telegram in her hand.

"This has just come," she cried, in some excitement; "it is from Archie. He has returned, and will be here this evening."

She sat down as she spoke on the edge of the table, and put her slim hand affectionately on my shoulder.

"You won't be sorry to see him, Vi, will you?" was my answer.

"Sorry!" she cried. "I cannot tell you how thankful I am! You never supposed I was nervous, did you, father; but the fact is, I hated Archie going away with Jack Fletcher. Oh, I know that Jack is a right good fellow, but he is terribly wild and daring. Lately I have had most uncomfortable dreams about both of them. Yes, it is a relief to get this telegram. Archie promises to call about ten o'clock; how nice it will be to see him again!"

Her bright eyes sparkled as she spoke, and into them stole that radiant look which girls wear when they speak of the man they love best on earth.

"Ah! Vivien," I answered, "there are two sides to every question. Archie will be taking you away, and what shall I do?"

"You will have another home to go to," she replied, but her face suddenly became grave.

"I wonder what their adventures have been," she said, a moment later.

"They will tell you themselves before another hour is out," I answered. I glanced, as I spoke, at a small clock on the mantelpiece. Vivien gave a quick sigh and stood up. She was in full evening dress, of some soft, white texture, and wore a bunch of yellow roses at her belt.

"Aunt Mary wishes me to go with her to Lady Farrell's reception," she said, "but I will be back, if possible, within the hour."

"Well, go, my dear, and enjoy yourself," I answered, standing up and kissing her. "If Archie should arrive before you are back, I will get him to wait."

She slowly left the room. I lay back in my chair and thought over my girl's prospects. The moments flew quickly. Shortly after ten o'clock I heard the hall-door bell ring, and the next instant Archie burst into the room.

"Here you are, old fellow, and you are welcome," I said, grasping him by the hand.

He came to me hurriedly; his dress was in considerable disorder, and his face wore a wild and terribly disturbed expression. To my hearty grip of the hand he scarcely responded.

"Is anything wrong?" I said, giving him a quick glance.

"I am in awful trouble," was the reply. "Is Vivien in?"

"No, she is out with her aunt, but she got your telegram, and will be back almost immediately."

"I cannot see her; not just yet. Do you mind if I lock the door?"

"What is wrong, my dear fellow?"

"Oh, I am in terrible trouble," he repeated. He strode across the room as he spoke, turned the key in the lock, and then sank into the nearest chair.

"I want your advice and help badly, Dr. Kennedy," he continued.

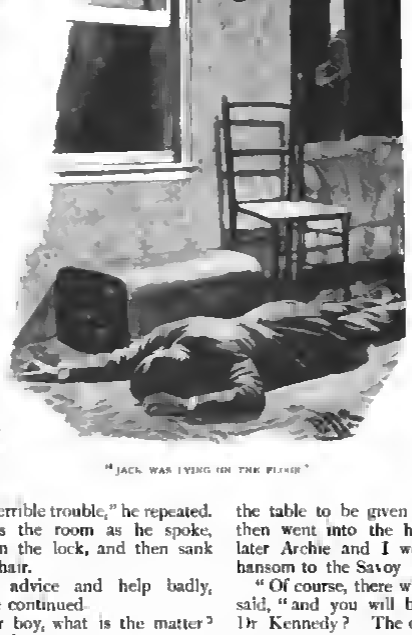
"But, my dear boy, what is the matter? What has happened?"

He raised his sunburnt face and looked at me gravely.

"Poor Jack is dead," he said then, in a broken sort of voice.

"Jack Fletcher!" I cried, springing to my feet.

"Yes, he died an hour ago, quite suddenly, at the Savoy Hotel, in his room. We got into London all right at six o'clock, and drove off to the Savoy at once. I never saw Jack in better spirits. We went to our rooms and had a wash and sat down to dinner at half-past seven. At half-past eight he went to his room for something. He did not come back, and after a time I followed him. I found his door locked and called to him, but he made no reply. In great alarm I went for help, and we had the door burst open. Jack was lying on the floor. Everything was done, of course. A doctor happened to be in the house, who applied all the usual restoratives, but it was too late; he was quite dead. My God, it is awful! I don't seem able to think. You must think for me, and come to the Savoy at once to see to things. What can have caused his death? You will come round, won't you?"



"JACK WAS LYING ON THE FLOOR."

"Yes, I'll come," I replied. "I'll just scribble a note to Vivien first. It is fearfully sad. Death must have been caused by heart failure, of course."

I scribbled a few words on a card, laid it on the table to be given to my daughter, and then went into the hall. A few moments later Archie and I were on our way in a hansom to the Savoy.

"Of course, there will be an inquest," he said, "and you will be present, won't you, Dr. Kennedy? The death must have been due to natural causes."

"Why, of course," I answered, looking round at him in some surprise. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing," he said, "only it

seems so strange. He was in the best of health and spirits.'

"All the same, there may have been lesion of the heart," I answered; "but we shall soon know. You say you found the door of his room locked?"

"Yes, fast, and the key was within, the window was open, though."

"What had that to do with it?"

"Nothing." Archie hung his head. Painful as the occasion was, his gloom and depression seemed greater than the circumstance warranted.

We soon reached the hotel. I saw poor Fletcher's body. Until a post mortem was made it was impossible to tell the cause of death, so I superintended all the details of the removal, sent off a wire and letter to the poor fellow's mother in Lancashire, and then rejoined Archie in his private sitting room. I found him pacing up and down the room, a wild gleam in his eye, a restlessness about his manner which I had never observed before. Once more I thought that Jack Fletcher's death could scarcely account for the disordered state of his whole appearance.

"You must pull yourself together, my boy," I said. "Men have died suddenly before now. Of course it is fearfully sad, but you have got Vivien to think of."

"I don't want to see her to-night," he said, eagerly.

"Why so?" I asked.

"She must be acquainted with the fact of Jack's death; it will upset her, and I—the fact is, I am completely done up; I don't know myself, doctor."

"Nor do I know you, Archie, in your present state. You must pull yourself together; and I tell you what, the very best thing you can do is to come away with me, and let us put you up for the night. Vivien will naturally expect to see you, whatever has happened, and the sooner you unburden your mind to her the better."

"My nerves are shaken to bits," he replied. "I have the strangest feeling about this whole matter. There is a cloud over me. The fact is, I don't believe Vivien and I will ever be married."

"Oh, nonsense, my dear fellow; come and have a talk with my sensible, matter-of-fact girl, and you will feel a new man. I am not going to leave you here, so come at once."

I got him to do so, but evidently with extreme unwillingness.

When we got home Vivien was waiting for us. She came into the hall. One glance into her face caused Archie to change colour. He went up to her, kissed her, took her hand, and then dropped it again.

"Something very sad has happened, Vivien," I remarked, "and Archie wants to tell you. Take him into your private room, my love, and have a good talk."

"Come, Archie, this way," said the girl. She led him down one of the corridors, opened the door of her own sitting room, and closed it behind them.

"This is a queer affair," I could not help murmuring to myself. "Strange and disastrous as Jack Fletcher's death is, I am more disturbed about Archie. What can be the matter with him?"

The next day, with the consent of the coroner, I assisted at the autopsy. I need not go into details, but merely state at once that, after two hours' careful and most minute investigation, the cause of Jack Fletcher's death still remained an absolute mystery. Every organ was sound, there was no wound anywhere, and not a trace of poison was discovered. Dr Benjamin Curtis, the skilled pathologist and analyst, was present, and the last sentence of his exhaustive report I append herewith:—

"There is absolutely nothing to account for the cause of death, and the only remaining alternative is that it was probably due to some very severe nervous shock of central origin, the nature of which is wholly obscure."

I flung the report down in annoyance, and went to meet Archie, who was waiting for me outside the coroner's court. I told him what Dr. Curtis had said. To my astonishment his face turned ashy white, and he almost reeled as he walked.

"Then it is as I thought," he said.

"What do you think?" I said. "Forbes, you are keeping something from us, you have something on your mind. What is wrong?"

"Nothing, nothing," he said, hurriedly. "I hoped the coroner would find a cause for death. Dr Curtis's report has upset me."

I asked a few more questions, and felt now absolutely convinced that Forbes was concealing something. Whatever it was, he was determined to keep it to himself. I went home considerably troubled.

A week after poor Jack's funeral, Vivien came into my consulting room. Archie had only been to the house once, and on that occasion he could not be got to say a word with regard to their approaching marriage.

"Now, father," said my girl, closing the door, and coming up and planting herself in front of me, "there is something wrong, and you have got to find out what it is."

I looked full into her eyes, they were brighter than usual, and had a suspicion of tears about them.

"Archie is terribly changed," she said, "you must have noticed it."

"I have," I answered, in a low tone.

"I know he was very much attached to Jack," continued Vivien, "but this is no ordinary grief. There is something terrible weighing on his mind. If I did not know that he was a thoroughly brave fellow, I should say that he was oppressed by a fearful sense of overmastering fear. It cannot be that. What, then, can it be?"

I made no answer. She continued to stand upright before me, and to keep her eyes fixed on my face.

"What can it be?" she repeated. "I puzzle myself over the whole thing day and night. I don't believe he is tired of me."

"Assuredly that is not the case," was my quick response.

"But all the same, he is completely changed," she continued. "Before he went on this cruise, he was devoted to me—each moment in my presence was paradise to him—now it may be likened to purgatory. He is restless until he gets away from me. When he is with me he is unhappy and *distrait*. In short, there is something terribly wrong, and you must help me to find out what it is."

"Ask him yourself, my dear. I have seen just what you have seen, but cannot get him to say a word."

"I am glad you agree with me," she said, the gloom of her brow lightening for a moment. "I will write to him at once and ask him to come here."

She had scarcely said the words before the door was opened and Forbes himself came in.

"Ah, that's right, Archie," I cried, in a tone of relief. "Come over here, dear fellow, and sit down. The fact is, Vivien is thoroughly unhappy. She sees that there is something wrong with you, and is discontented with the present state of matters. You have something on your mind, and you ought to tell us what it is."

Forbes raised two lack-lustre eyes and fixed them on the girl's face. The tears which were close to her grey eyes now brimmed over.

"Archie," she said, going up to him and laying her hand on his shoulder, "I want to ask you a plain question. Would you like our engagement to be broken off?"

"ARCHIE, SHE SAID, 'I WANT TO ASK YOU A PLAIN QUESTION'"

"I was coming here to propose it, Vivien," was his strange reply.

She turned very white, and fell back as if someone had dealt her a blow.

"Good God!" she said. "It is then as I feared; there is something terribly wrong."

"It is not that I do not love you as much as ever," continued the poor fellow, "but I have no right to bind you to me. I scarcely dare to tell you what has happened. I am unworthy of you, Vivien, and besides, I am doomed. It is only a matter of time."

He flung himself into the nearest chair, and covered his face with two hands which trembled from nervous terror.

I nodded to Vivien.

"You had better leave him with me for a few moments," I said.

"No, I will not," she answered, desperately. "I have a right to know the truth, and I am determined to get at it. What is wrong, Archie? You are not tired of me? You still love me, don't you?"

"With all my heart and soul," he groaned.

"And yet you want our engagement to be broken off! Why?"

"Because I am a guilty and doomed man," was his reply.

I started and felt my heart beat. Was it possible? But, no—I flung the unworthy suspicion from me.

"I ought not to be in this house," continued Archie. "I ought not to have let you kiss me the night we came home. I am unworthy of you, and yet . . . My God! this misery is driving me mad"

He pushed back the hair from his forehead; there were beads of perspiration on his brow.

"If we were engaged fifty times over, our wedding would never come off," he continued, speaking in the most reckless, excited tone. "I can no more prevent the fate which is hanging over me, than I can get rid of that thing which has stained me. I can only say this: As Jack died so I shall die. I am doomed, and the less you have to say to me the better."

"Now, that is all nonsense," she said, in her quick way, which could, at times of intense emotion, be wonderfully matter-of-fact, and, therefore, soothing. "Whatever you have done you must tell me and you must tell father, and you must allow us to judge as to whether it is a barrier between you and me or not. As to my love, you must have a very poor opinion of it if you think I would forsake you in an hour of trouble. Women who care for a man do not leave him when he is down. I am a woman, and, I hope, a brave one. I mean to comfort you, and to stay by you to the last, whatever has happened; yes, *whatever* has happened"

He looked at her with incredulous eyes, into which just a flicker of hope returned

"You cannot mean it?" he cried

"Yes, I do mean it; but I want your whole confidence, and so does father You are concealing something You must tell us at once."

"Yes, speak, Archie," I said, gravely "Vivien, my girl, come here and stand by me Archie, this is no ordinary case. Vivien and I will deal with you with all fairness, only we must know the absolute truth."

"I meant to tell you some days ago," said Archie, fixing his eyes on my face, "but somehow I could not get the pluck The whole thing is so horrible, and the burden on my conscience so great, that I am overcome by a ghastly fear. I cannot fight against it"

"Well, speak," I said, with impatience.

"It is the queerest thing on earth," he said, slowly "It has half stunned me. Though I consider myself pretty tough, the whole thing has knocked the pluck clean out of me"

He paused to wet his dry lips, and continued —

"You know we were in the Mediterranean cruising about for six weeks?"

I nodded.

"We were just about to come home, when Fletcher, who was always up to a lark, suggested that we should go through the Canal, down to Jeddah, and then on to Mecca, to see the pilgrims They would be all there, as it was the twelfth month of the Mohammedan year. I did not mind, so we went. We left the yacht at Jeddah, and went on to Mecca. The place was one mass of pilgrims They were on their way to the Kaaba, the oblong stone building within the great Mosque You have heard of it, of course, and also of the famous lava-like Black Stone, to which all Moslems turn in their prayers. It was in the north-east corner of the building The place was in a sort of uproar, for it is part of the faith of every good Moslem to kiss that stone once in the course of his life. Well, Dr. Kennedy, you would scarcely believe it, but Fletcher, when he got into the midst of this throng, seemed to turn quite mad. He lost his head, and insisted that we should go and see the whole show. He intended to kiss the Black Stone, if he could. Of course, I knew we should run into the most fearful danger, and did my best to dissuade him, but nothing would do; go he would. He said to me:—

"'You may stay away, old boy; you are engaged to be married, and perhaps ought to consider your life a little bit, but with me it is different. When I want a lark, I must have it at all risks. I am going, you can please yourself'

"Of course, I didn't relish running the risk of being torn to pieces, but I wasn't the fellow to see him start off alone, so at last I agreed to go with him We put on the *Ihram*, the woollen thing worn by the Arabs round the waist and shoulders, got some sandals, and went bare-headed with the crowd of pilgrims to the Mosque. We joined the procession and managed to get right inside, and Jack got inside the Kaaba and went up to the north-east corner of the building and kissed the Black Stone. He told me afterwards that it is quite worn away

with the kisses of millions of human beings. I missed him in the crowd, and just as I was looking round to see where he could have got to, I noticed one of the Mueddins, or priests, watching me closely, and when his eyes met mine, I can tell you I shuddered. From the moment they singled me out he seemed never to take his gaze away, and I shall not, to my dying day, forget the expression of cruel, fierce suspicion that was stamped on his face, which was rendered hideous by being deeply pitted with small pox.

"Well, Jack turned up, and we got out all right, and Jack, poor fellow! was in the best of spirits. He said it was the biggest lark he had ever enjoyed, and he did nothing but laugh at my fears. I told him about the priest, and said I was certain we had been discovered, but he made nothing of it.

"When we got out we were in an awful crowd, and our donkeys could scarcely move. We had just cleared the thickest of the mob, and I was hoping we were safe, when I noticed the priest, who had already observed me in the Mosque, detach himself from the crowd and move swiftly towards us. It was now nearly dark. I saw that he wanted to speak and, not knowing why I did it, reined in my donkey. He came up to my side. In his left hand he held a parchment scroll, and as I took it I saw his right hand steal down to his belt. There was the flash of steel. In an instant I should have been stabbed. I do not know what came over me; there was a ringing in my ears, and my head seemed to swim. I leant quickly over the donkey and plunged my long hunting knife with all my force into the man's heart. He fell without a groan. I touched Jack on the arm. We galloped madly and for our lives. The mob followed us, but we outpaced them, and at last their howls and shouts grew fainter and fainter behind us. We reached Jeddah in safety, got on board, and steamed away with all possible speed.

"'Why in the name of Heaven did you kill him, Archie?' said Jack to me then.

"'He would have killed us if we had not killed him,' was my reply, but while I spoke there was a dead weight at my heart, and wherever I turned I seemed to see the dying eyes of the man, and to hear the thud of his body as he fell to the ground.

"HE FELL WITHOUT A GROAN."

"'Have you got the parchment he put into your hand?' continued Jack.

"I had. He took it from me and opened it. It had some writing on it in Arabic, which we could both read and speak. Jack copied it out in English, and here it is."

As he spoke Archie produced from his pocket-book a piece of parchment and an old envelope, and read as follows:—

"*The vengeance of Mahomet rests upon the two infidels and unbelievers who have profaned the Prophet. Their days are numbered, and before the sun rise on the Festival of Eed-Al Kurban in the month of Dsul Heggeh they will be no more.*"

"There," said Archie, standing up, "that is what was written; and now, Dr. Kennedy, that I have had courage to tell you my story, I want to ask you a question. Do you think it is within the bounds of probability, or even possibility, that poor Fletcher's sudden death could have had any connection with this affair?"

"Absolutely out of the question," was my first remark, but then I paused to think the situation over.

"You certainly did a mad thing," I said then; "not only did you profane the religious rights of these fanatics, but you, in especial, killed one of their priests. Under such circumstances there is little doubt that they would do much to compass their revenge, but that they would follow you both to England seems on the face of it ridiculous. No, no, Archie; it is an unpleasant business, and I am sorry you did not tell me before, but that Jack's death has anything to do with that paper is the wildest fiction."

"I do not believe you," he answered. "I am firmly convinced that the Mueddin whom I killed will be revenged. Jack is already dead and the words of the prophecy will come, true with regard to me. I shall not live after sunrise on the festival of Eed-Al-Kurban, whenever that is.'

While he was speaking Vivien had remained absolutely quiet. She went up to him now, and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Why do you touch me?" he said, starting away from her. "I have that man's blood on my hands."

"You did it in self-defence," she answered. "But we must not think of that at all now, Father"—she turned to me—"I agree with Archie: I believe that his life is in grave danger. We must save him; that is our present business. Nothing else can be thought of until his life is safe."

"I have one thing more to say," continued Archie. "Last night I saw one of the Mueddins in London. I knew him, I could not mistake him; he resembled the priest I had killed. He was standing under a lamp-post, opposite St. George's Hospital. He fixed his eyes on my face. I believe he is the man who compassed poor Jack's death, and mine is only a matter of time.'

"Come, come, this is nonsense," I answered. "Fletcher was not murdered."

"What did he die of?" asked Archie, gloomily. "You say yourself that he was thoroughly healthy; he was in the prime of youth. Do healthy men in the prime of youth die suddenly without any discoverable cause? I ask you a straight question.'

"The death was a strange one," I could not help replying.

"Very strange," echoed Vivien, "strange enough," she added, "to account for Archie's fears. The Moslems have threatened the deaths of both Archie and Jack. Jack is dead. Archie is the most guilty man of the two, for he killed their priest. They will certainly not leave a stone unturned to kill him."

"Yes, my days are numbered," said Forbes; "there is no getting over the fact. Vivien, our engagement must come to an end, and in any case I feel now that I have no right to marry you."

Vivien's brows contracted in a nervous frown.

"We will not talk of our marriage at present," she said, with some impatience, "but why should we not consult Dr. Khan?"

"Dr. Khan!" I cried. "Do you mean the Persian?"

"Yes; why should not we all three go to him at once? He knows much more about these Arabs and their queer ways and their sorceries than anyone else in London."

"Upon my word, it is a capital idea," I said. "Khan does know strange things, and is up to all the lore of the East. He is in some ways one of the cleverest fellows I know. He does not practise, but he has gone in for chemical research and forensic medicine as a hobby. There is no one in London whose opinion would be of more value in a difficult case like the present, and, being a Mohammedan by religion, he can help us with the side issues of this most extraordinary affair. Archie, you have got to pull yourself together, my boy, if for no other reason, for Vivien's sake. Come, we will go down to Professor Khan's chambers in Gray's Inn at once, and tell him the whole story."

"And Dr. Khan is a special friend of mine," said Vivien, brightly. "Oh, now that we are doing something to help you, Archie, I can live."

I crossed the room to order the carriage. As I did so I heard Archie say to her, in a low tone—

"And you love me still?"

"I love you still," was her reply.

He drew himself up, the colour returned to his ashen cheeks and the light to his eyes.

In half an hour we were all driving to Hussein Khan's chambers, in Gray's Inn. When we reached them I rang the outer bell. It seemed ages before anyone came. At last the door was opened by an old housekeeper, in his shirt sleeves. He recognised me, and nodded when I spoke to him.

"Is Dr. Khan in?" I asked.

"Yes, sir; you know your way," was the answer.

We hurried up the uncarpeted stairs to the second floor, and pressed the electric bell. There was the sound of the latch

being drawn back inside; I pushed the panel, and we all three entered; the door closed automatically behind us, and stretched on the sofa at the far end of a long room, in a loose dressing-gown and slippers, lay the Persian. He was smoking a long opium pipe. The moment his eyes rested upon Vivien he put down the pipe and stood up. He looked us all over with heavy, lustreless eyes, and nodded slowly. He was evidently only half awake.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Professor," I said, apologetically. "You know my daughter, of course?"

Vivien came forward and offered her hand. Khan bent over it, and then raised it respectfully to his lips.

"I have not forgotten Miss Vivien," he said.

"I have come here to-day because I am in great trouble, and because I want your advice," she said at once. "It has to do with this gentleman. May I introduce him? Mr. Forbes—Dr. Khan."

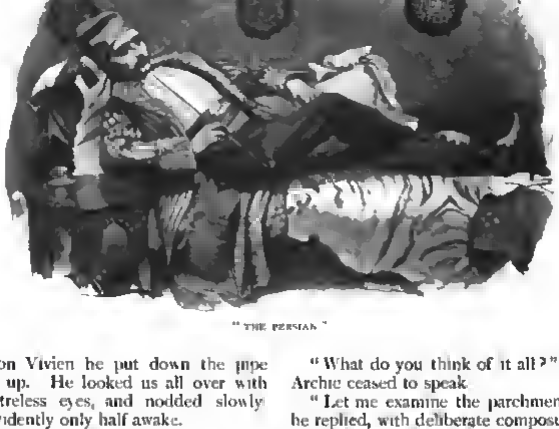
Dr. Khan slowly turned his heavy eyes in Archie's direction. He looked him all over from head to foot, and then, rather to my astonishment, I observed a lightning look of intelligence and remarkable interest fill his eyes.

"Has the trouble anything to do with Mr. Forbes?" he said, glancing at Vivien.

"It has."

"Then I believe I may help you. Sit down, sir, pray, and tell me at once what is the matter."

Archie told his strange tale. While he spoke I closely watched the effect on my friend, but, once the narrative had begun, the expression on the Persian's face never altered. After that first glance of interest, it had settled down into a stolid, Oriental indifference.



"THE PERSIAN."

"What do you think of it all?" I said, as Archie ceased to speak.

"Let me examine the parchment, please," he replied, with deliberate composure.

Archie gave it to him. He took it and read it over and over again, muttering the words to himself.

"You could find no cause for your friend's death?"

"None."

"You are quite certain, Mr. Forbes, that the man you saw yesterday outside St. George's Hospital was one of the Muezdins whom you had already noticed in the Mosque?"

"Quite."

"Well, my dear friend, I am sorry to say it looks a very queer business."

"And do you really believe that Jack's death was the work of the Muezdin?" I cried, aghast at his words.

"No, I only say that it is quite possible. I recall a similar case, the same thing may happen again. The Arabians, upon whose early researches the whole science of Europe was founded, possess, of course, secrets unknown to our Western scientists of the present day. I have seen some strange things done by them. The act of sacrilege

you both committed was one of the gravest offences possible, but it is just within the realm of possibility that such a crime might have been looked over, but as you, my friend, killed one of the priests as well, the Mohammedans whom you so deeply insulted would not leave a stone unturned to compass your end. The marvel is that you escaped immediate death. But now let us quite clearly sum up the position as it stands."

As he spoke the Persian stood up. He remained quiet for a moment thinking deeply, then he crossed the room and took down a volume in Arabic from a shelf. With pencil and paper he began working some calculations, referring now and then to an almanac, and once to a map of Asia.

We all three watched him in intense silence. After a moment or two he looked up.

"Assuming for the sake of argument that the Mueddin whom you saw last night has undertaken this work of revenge," he continued, "the position is this. Owing to the Arabs' year being a lunar one, the festival of Eed-Al-Kurban does not occur at the same date each year. I see, however, that it will commence according to our calendar to-morrow, the 8th of June, at daybreak, or Subh. At daybreak or Subh the first call to prayer is given by the Mueddin from the Mosque. Now, Mecca is exactly 40deg. longitude east of Greenwich, and, therefore, day will break with them two hours and forty minutes earlier than with us — that is, at seven minutes past one o'clock to-morrow morning. Of course, the Mueddin, whom you believe to have followed you, would know all this. And as, according to the words on the parchment, you are both to be dead *before* sunrise on the festival of Eed-Al-Kurban, so also, *failing* the fulfilment of this vow, you are perfectly safe when that hour has passed."

"Then you believe that Archie is in grave danger until after one o'clock to-morrow morning?" exclaimed Vivien.

"That is my belief," answered Dr. Khan, bowing to her.

"But all this is most unsatisfactory," I cried, getting up. "Surely, Dr. Khan, even granted that it is as you say, we can easily protect Forbes. He has but to stay quietly at home until the hour of danger is past. These Arabs are not magicians: they cannot hurt a man in his own house, for instance?"

"How was it your friend died?" said the Persian, looking full into Archie's face.

"That I cannot say," was the reply.

Dr. Khan shrugged his shoulders.

"You declare that the Arabs are not magicians," he said, turning to me, "but that is just the point. They *are!* I can tell you things which I have seen with my own eyes which happened in Arabia that you would find hard to believe."

"HE BEGAN WORKING SOME CALCULATIONS."

"Very likely," I answered, "but they require the Oriental stage-and-surroundings for the exhibition of the so-called phenomena. They cannot use magic within the four-mile radius of Charing Cross, under the vigilant eye of the Metropolitan police."

Dr. Khan did not immediately answer. He remained motionless in deep thought.

"What do you intend to do to-night?" he said then, turning to Archie.

"I have made no plans," was the low, indifferent reply. "I am so certain of my impending end," he continued, "that nothing seems to make any difference."

"You must come home with us, Archie," cried Vivien. "Dr. Khan declares that after one o'clock you are safe. Until one o'clock you must be with us, and suppose, Dr. Khan," she added, "you come too? Suppose we spend this momentous evening together? What do you say, father?"

Before I could answer the Persian said, slowly,—

"I was going to ask you to invite me. Yes, I will come, with pleasure."

"One more question," said Vivien, "you do firmly believe that Archie will be safe *after* one o'clock to-morrow morning?"

"Yes; the words on the parchment point distinctly to his death on or before the commencement of the festival. The Mohammedans keep their vows to the letter, or not at all."

As he spoke Dr. Khan got up slowly, went into his bedroom, and reappeared ready dressed for the evening. It was already nearly seven o'clock. We got into my carriage and returned to Harley Street. I sent a servant for Archie's evening dress to the hotel, and at eight o'clock we found ourselves seated round the dinner table. It was a strange and silent meal, and I do not think we any of us had much appetite.

I am naturally not a superstitious man, but matters were sufficiently queer and out of the way to excite a certain foreboding which I could neither account for nor dismiss. The Persian looked utterly calm and indifferent, as betokened his race. But I noticed that from time to time he fixed his deep-set, brilliant eyes on Forbes's haggard face, as if he would read him through.

The night happened to be the hottest of that year. There was not a breath of air, and the heat inside the house was stifling.

When dinner was over, Vivien suggested that we should go into my smoking-room. The house was a corner one, and the windows of the smoking-room were on the ground floor, and looked into a side street.

She seated herself by Archie's side. He took little or no notice of her. Khan continued to give him anxious glances from time to time. Vivien was restless, often rising from her seat.

"Sit down, Miss Vivien," said Dr. Khan, suddenly. "I know exactly what you feel, but the time will soon pass. Let me tell you something interesting."

She shook her head. It was almost beyond her power to listen. The gloomy face of her lover, the slightly bent figure which had been so athletic and upright, the change in the whole man, absorbed her entire attention.

"Save him—give him back to me if you can," was the unspoken wish in her eyes, as they fixed themselves for a moment on Dr. Khan's face.

He gave her a strange smile, and then turning addressed me. He was the most brilliant talker I ever met, and on this occasion he roused all the power of his great intellect to make his conversation interesting. He related some of his own experiences in the East, and made many marvellous revelations with regard to modern science.

Eleven and twelve chimed from a neighbouring church clock. Soon after midnight the Persian, who had been silent for several moments, said, suddenly, "During this last hour of suspense, I should like to put out the electric light."

As he spoke he crossed the room, and was about to switch off the current when our attention was suddenly attracted to Vivien. She had sunk back in her seat with a deep sigh. The intense heat of the room had been too much for her.

"Air! Air!" I cried.

Archie laid his hand on the heavy sash of one of the windows and raised it. There seemed to be a hush everywhere—I had never known so still a night. But just at

"HE REELED AND CLUTCHED WILDLY AT THE LINTEL OF THE WINDOW."

that instant I saw—or fancied I saw—the tassel of the blind move, as though the air had quivered.

The next instant Khan uttered a sharp cry.

"He is there—he has done it—I thought so!"

The words died on his lips, for Archie Forbes reeled, clutched wildly at the lintel of the window, and then with a heavy thud lay like a log on the floor.

I had always looked upon the Persian as a man of exceptional promptitude and great strength of character, but never for a moment had I realized his lightning grasp of an emergency.

"Artificial respiration — don't lose a moment. Take his chest, man; we shall save him!" he cried. As he spoke he leapt through the open window, vaulted the railings, and was in the street.

The shock acted upon Vivien like a charm. With her assistance I tore open Forbes's collar and shirt, and began applying artificial respiration with all my might. In less than a minute the Persian came back. He carried a small box in his hand.

"The solution of the mystery," he said. "I will explain presently. Now to save him. I believe we shall do it."

He fell on his knees and helped me with the artificial respiration with all his might. For five long minutes there was not the slightest result. Then there came a feeble gasp. It was followed by another. We redoubled our efforts and waited for a moment. Forbes began to breathe again; we drew back and dashed the sweat from our streaming faces.

"He will do now," whispered Khan, "leave him quiet."

"What is it? For God's sake, what is it?" I said, as soon as I could get my voice to speak.

"I will tell you. This has been the most dastardly and awful thing. I have been trying to get at the solution the whole evening, and just grasped it as Mr. Forbes stood up to open that window. I was too late. He got what they meant for him, but he will do. Yes, his pulse is stronger."

I laid my hand on the victim's wrist: the beats came more regularly each moment, though he was still only half-conscious.

"But what can it be?" I cried, "what have you discovered?"

Khan's eyes were blazing with excitement.

"What has happened?" I continued. "A bullet through the brain could not have been more instantaneous, but, silent and unseen, before our very eyes the blow fell and left no trace. This is magic with a vengeance."

"I will explain it," said Khan. "I have been hammering out the solution all the evening, and, fool that I was, never suspected the real thing until just too late. Look here—here is something that your modern scientific criminal has never dreamt of."

"I TORE OPEN FORBES'S COLLAR."

"But what the deuce is it?" I said, examining a small box in much bewilderment which Khan now placed in my hands. Three of the sides and the top and bottom were made of wood, but across one end was stretched some material which looked like indiarubber. At the opposite end to this was a small circular opening, which could be closed by a hinged flap.

"Explain what this means, for God's sake," I cried. As I spoke I bent my nose towards the box, and instantly was seized by a catching sensation at the back of the throat.

"Ah, you had better not come too close to it," cried Khan. "This box contained the most deadly gas known to modern chemists: the vapour of concentrated anhydrous hydrogen cyanide."

I started back. Well did I know the action of this most infernally potent and deadly gas. Still, the mystery of how the gas reached Forbes was unexplained.

"How was it done?" I cried, staring at Khan in absolute bewilderment.

"Simply in this way," he answered. As he spoke he lit a cigarette, and at the same time laid his hand on the box. "The poison was projected as a vortex ring in the marvellous and mysterious rotational motion which vortex rings assume. This motion can be imparted to gas, but even scientists of the present day cannot explain it, although the study has given rise to Thompson's fascinating theory on the constitution of matter. All we know is this," continued Khan, "that, projected by the operator, a ring of that gas would move through the air as a solid body, and would burst as true as a shot from a rifle, and slay as quickly, only it would be perfectly silent and invisible. When made with smoke these rings are visible, of course, and we can watch their motion—so." He shot a ring of cigarette smoke from his mouth, and I watched it as it sailed across the room and burst at last into curling wreaths.

"With this apparatus," he continued, pointing to the box, "an enormous velocity could be given to a vortex ring. Even in broad daylight its approach could not be seen, and, breaking on the mouth and nostrils of a man, it would instantly kill him unless artificial respiration were immediately resorted to. Yes," he added, "the modern detective has a lot to learn."

"But the man who did it?" I cried.

"Gone! We shall never see or hear of him again. He must have seen me when I leapt from the window, and dropped the box in his hasty flight. Of course he followed us here, and crept up to the open window. This was the Mueddin's chance—he projected the vortex ring straight into Archie's face. Thank Heaven, the instant remedies employed have saved him. One second's delay, and he must have died."

Forbes had now staggered to a sitting posture, and Vivien had fallen on her knees by his side.

"Leave us alone, father," she said to me; "yes, leave us alone for a little."

And the Persian and I slowly left the room.

My girl is now married to Archie Forbes. She loves him, as only such women can love. He has recovered his manhood and his pluck, but there is a shadow on his face which I think will stay there while he lives.

THE SPIDER of GUYANA

FROM THE FRENCH OF

LACKMANN CHATRIAN.

THE mineral waters of Spinbronn, in Hundsruck, a few leagues from Pirmesans, formerly enjoyed an excellent reputation, for Spinbronn was the rendezvous of all the gouty and rheumatic members of the German aristocracy. The wild nature of the surrounding country did not deter the visitors, for they were lodged in charming villas at the foot of the mountain. They bathed in the cascade which fell in large sheets of foam from the summit of the rocks, and drank two or three pints of the water every day. Dr Daniel Haselnoss, who prescribed for the sick and those who thought they were, received his patients in a large wig, brown coat, and ruffles, and was rapidly making his fortune.

To-day, however, Spinbronn is no longer a favourite watering place. The fashionable visitors have disappeared; Dr Haselnoss has given up his practice; and the town is only inhabited by a few poor, miserable wood-cutters. All this is the result of a succession of strange and unprecedented catastrophes, which Councillor Bremen, of Pirmesans, recounted to me the other evening.

"You know, Mr Fritz," he said, "that the source of the Spinbronn flows from a sort of cavern about 5ft. high, and from 10ft. to 15ft. across, the water, which has a temperature of 67deg. centigrade, is salt. The front of the cavern is half hidden by moss, ivy, and low shrubs, and it is impossible to find out the depth of it, because of the thermal exhalations which prevent any entrance.

"In spite of that, it had been remarked for a century that the birds of the locality, hawks, thrushes, and turtle-doves, were engulphed in full flight, and no one knew of what mysterious influence it was the result. During the season of 1801, for some unexplained reason, the source became more abundant, and the visitors one evening, taking their constitutional promenade on the lawns at the foot of the rocks, saw a human skeleton descend from the cascade.

"You can imagine the general alarm, Mr Fritz. It was naturally supposed that a murder had been committed at Spinbronn some years before, and that the victim had been thrown into the source. But the skeleton, which was blanched as white as snow, only weighed twelve pounds, and Dr. Haselnoss concluded that, in all probability, it had been in the sand more than three centuries to have arrived at that state of desiccation.

"Plausible as his reasoning was, it did not prevent many visitors leaving that same day, horrified to have drunk the waters. The

really gouty and rheumatic ones, however, stayed on, and consoled themselves with the doctor's version. But the following days the cavern disgorged all that it contained of detritus, and a veritable ossuary descended the mountain—skeletons of animals of all sorts, quadrupeds, birds, reptiles. In fact, all the most horrible things that could be imagined.

"Then Haselnoss wrote and published a pamphlet to prove that all these bones were relics of the antediluvian world, that they were fossil skeletons, accumulated there in a sort of funnel during the universal Deluge, that is to say, four thousand years before Christ; and, consequently, could only be regarded as stones, and not as anything repulsive.

"But his work had barely reassured the gouty ones, when one fine morning the corpse of a fox, and then of a hawk, with all its plumage, fell from the cascade. Impossible to maintain that these had existed before the Deluge, and the exodus became general.

"'How horrible!' cried the ladies. 'That is where the so-called virtue of mineral waters springs from. Better die of rheumatism than continue such a remedy.'

"At the end of a week the only visitor left was a stout Englishman, Commodore Sir Thomas Hawerbrook, who lived on a grand scale, as most Englishmen do. He was tall and very stout, and of a florid complexion. His hands were literally knotted with gout, and he would have drunk no matter what if he thought it would cure him. He laughed loudly at the desertion of the sufferers, installed himself in the best of the villas, and announced his intention of spending the winter at Spinbronn."

Here Councillor Bremen leisurely took a large pinch of snuff to refresh his memory, and with the tips of his fingers shook off the tiny particles which fell on his delicate lace jabot. Then he went on:—

"Five or six years before the revolution of 1789, a young doctor of Pirmesans, called Christian Weber, went to St Domingo to seek his fortune. He had been very successful, and was about to retire, when the revolt of the negroes occurred. Happily he escaped the massacre, and was able to save part of his fortune. He travelled for a time in South America, and about the period of which I speak, returned to Pirmesans, and bought the house and what remained of the practice of Dr. Haselnoss.

"Dr. Christian Weber brought with him an old negress called Agatha, a very ugly old woman, with a flat nose, and enormous lips. She always enveloped her head in a sort of turban of the most startling colours, and wore rings in her ears which reached to her shoulders. Altogether she was such a singular-looking creature, that the mountaineers came from miles around just to look at her.

"The doctor himself was a tall, thin man, invariably dressed in a blue swallow-tailed coat and leather breeches. He talked very little, his laugh was dry and nervous, and his habits most eccentric. During his wanderings he had collected a number of insects of almost every species, and seemed to be much more interested in them than in his patients. In his daily rambles among the mountains he often found butterflies to add to his collection, and these he brought home pinned to the lining of his hat.

"AGATHA."

"Dr. Weber, Mr. Fritz, was my cousin and my guardian, and directly he returned to Germany he took me from school, and settled me with him at Spinbronn. Agatha was a great friend

of mine, though at first she frightened me, but she was a good creature, knew how to make the most delicious sweets, and could sing the most charming songs.

"Sir Thomas and Dr. Weber were on friendly terms, and spent long hours together talking of subjects beyond my comprehension —of transmission of fluids, and mysterious things which they had observed in their travels. Another mystery to me was the singular influence which the doctor appeared to have over the negress, for though she was generally particularly lively, ready to be amused at the slightest thing, yet she trembled like a leaf if she encountered her master's eyes fixed upon her.

"I have told you that birds, and even large animals, were engulphed in the cavern. After the disappearance of the visitors, some of the old inhabitants remembered that about fifty years before a young girl, Loisa Muller, who lived with her grandmother in a cottage near the source, had suddenly disappeared. She had gone out one morning to gather herbs, and was never seen or heard of again, but her apron had been found a few days later near the mouth of the cavern. From that it was evident to all that the skeleton about which Dr. Haselnoss had written so eloquently was that of the poor girl, who had, no doubt, been drawn into the cavern by the mysterious influence which almost daily acted upon more feeble creatures. What that influence was nobody could tell! The superstitious mountaineers believed that the devil inhabited the cavern, and terror spread throughout the district.

"One afternoon, in the month of July, my cousin was occupied in classifying his insects and re-arranging them in their cases. He had found some curious ones the night before, at which he was highly delighted. I was helping by making a needle red-hot in the flame of a candle.

"Sir Thomas, lying back in a chair near the window and smoking a big cigar, was regarding us with a dreamy air. The commodore was very fond of me. He often took me driving with him, and used to like to hear me chatter in English. When the doctor had labelled all his butterflies, he opened the box of larger insects.

"'I caught a magnificent horn-beetle yesterday,' he said, 'the *lucanus cervus* of the Hartz oaks. It is a rare kind.'

"As he spoke I gave him the hot needle, which he passed through the insect preparatory to fixing it on the cork. Sir Thomas, who had taken no notice till then, rose and came to the table on which the case of specimens stood. He looked at the spider of Guyana, and an expression of horror passed over his rubicund features.

"'There,' he said, 'is the most hideous work of the Creator. I tremble only to look at it.'

"And, sure enough, a sudden pallor spread over his face.

"'Bah!' said my guardian, 'all that is childish nonsense. You heard your nurse scream at a spider, you were frightened, and the impression has remained. But if you regard the creature with a strong microscope, you would be astonished at the delicacy of its organs, at their admirable arrangement, and even at their beauty.'

"'It disgusts me,' said the commodore, brusquely. 'Pouff!'

"And he walked away.

"'I don't know why,' he continued, 'but a spider always freezes my blood.'

"Dr. Weber burst out laughing, but I felt the same as Sir Thomas, and sympathized with him.

"'Yes, cousin, take away that horrid creature,' I cried. 'It is frightful, and spoils all the others.'

"'Little stupid,' said he, while his eyes flashed, 'nobody compels you to look at them. If you are not pleased you can go.'

"Evidently he was angry, and Sir Thomas, who was standing by the window regarding the mountains, turned suddenly round, and took me by the hand.

"'Your guardian loves his spiders, Frantz,' he said, kindly. 'We prefer the trees and the grass. Come with me for a drive.'

"'Yes, go,' returned the doctor, 'and be back to dinner at six.' Then, raising his voice, 'No offence, Sir Thomas,' he said.

"Sir Thomas turned and laughed, and we went out to the carriage.

"The commodore decided to drive himself, and sent back his servant. He placed me on the seat beside him, and we started for Rothalps. While the carriage slowly mounted the sandy hill, I was quiet and sad. Sir Thomas, too, was grave, but my silence seemed to strike him.

"'You don't like the spiders, Frantz, neither do I. But, thank Heaven! there are no dangerous ones in this country. The spider which your cousin has in his box is found in the swampy forests of Guyana, which is always full of hot vapours and burning exhalations, for it needs a high temperature to support its existence. Its

immense web, or rather its net, would surround an ordinary thicket, and birds are caught in it, the same as flies in our spiders' webs. But do not think any more about it; let us drink a glass of Burgundy.'

"As he spoke he lifted the cover of the seat, and, taking out a flask of wine, poured me out a full leathern goblet.

"I felt better when I had drunk it, and we continued our way. The carriage was drawn by a little Ardennes pony, which climbed the steep incline as lightly and actively as a goat. The air was full of the murmur of myriads of insects. At our right was the forest of Rothalps. At our left was the cascade of Spinbronn; and the higher we mounted, the bluer became the silver sheets of water foaming in the distance, and the more musical the sound as the water passed over the rocks.

"Both Sir Thomas and I were captivated by the spectacle, and, lost in a reverie, allowed the pony to go on as he would. Soon we were within a hundred paces of the cavern of Spinbronn. The shrubs around the entrance were remarkably green. The water, as it flowed from the cavern, passed over the top of the rock, which was slightly hollowed, and there formed a small lake, from which it again burst forth and descended into the valley below. This lake was shallow, the bottom of it composed of sand and black pebbles, and, although covered with a slight vapour, the water was clear and limpid as crystal.

"The pony stopped to breathe. Sir Thomas got out and walked about for a few seconds.

"'How calm it is,' he said.

"Then, after a minute's silence, he continued: 'Frantz, if you were not here, I should have a bathe in that lake.'

"'Well, why not?' I answered. 'I will take a walk the while. There are numbers of strawberries to be found a little way up that mountain. I can go and get some, and be back in an hour.'

"'Capital idea, Frantz. Dr. Weber pretends that I drink too much Burgundy; we must counteract that with mineral water. This little lake looks inviting.'

"Then he fastened the pony to the trunk of a tree, and waved his hand in adieu. Sitting down on the moss, he commenced to take off his boots, and, as I walked away, he called after me —

"'In an hour, Frantz.'

"They were his last words.

"An hour after I returned. The pony, the carriage, and Sir Thomas's clothes were all that I could see. The sun was going down, and the shadows were lengthening. Not a sound of bird or of insect, and a silence as of death filled the solitude. This silence frightened me. I climbed on to the rock above the cavern, and looked right and left. There was nobody to be seen. I called; no one responded. The sound of my voice repeated by the echoes filled me with terror. Night was coming on. All of a sudden I remembered the disappearance of Loisa Muller, and I hurried down to the front of the cavern. There I stopped in affright, and glancing towards the entrance, I saw two red, motionless points.

"A second later I distinguished some dark moving object farther back in the cavern, farther perhaps than human eye had ever before penetrated, for fear had sharpened my sight, and given all my senses an acute-

"I SAW TWO RED, MOTIONLESS POINTS."

ness of perception which I had never before experienced

"During the next minute I distinctly heard the chirp, chirp of a grasshopper, and the bark of a dog in the distant village. Then my heart, which had been frozen with terror, commenced to beat furiously, and I heard nothing more. With a wild cry I fled, leaving pony and carriage.

"In less than twenty minutes, bounding over rocks and shrubs, I reached my cousin's door.

"'Run, run,' I cried, in a choking tone, as I burst into the room where Dr. Weber and some invited friends were waiting for us. 'Run, run; Sir Thomas is dead; Sir Thomas is in the cavern,' and I fell fainting on the floor.

"All the village turned out to search for the commodore. At ten o'clock they returned, bringing back Sir Thomas's clothes, the pony, and carriage. They had found nothing, seen nothing, and it was impossible to go ten paces into the cavern.

"During their absence Agatha and I remained in the chimney-corner, I still trembling with fear, she, with wide open eyes, going from time to time to the window, from which we could see the torches passing to and fro on the mountain, and hear the searchers shout to one another in the still night air.

"At her master's approach Agatha began to tremble. The doctor entered brusquely, pale, with set lips. He was followed by about twenty woodcutters, shaking out the last remnants of their nearly extinguished torches.

"He had barely entered before, with flashing eyes, he glanced round the room, as if in search of something. His eyes fell on the negress, and without a word being exchanged between them the poor woman began to cry.

"'No, no, I will not,' she shrieked.

"'But I will,' returned the doctor, in a hard tone.

"The negress shook from head to foot, as though seized by some invisible power. The doctor pointed to a seat, and she sat down as rigid as a corpse.

"The woodcutters, good, simple people, full of pious sentiments, crossed themselves, and I, who had never yet heard of the hypnotic force, began to tremble, thinking Agatha was dead.

"Dr. Weber approached the negress, and passed his hands over her forehead.

"'Are you ready?' he said.

"'Yes, sir.'

"'Sir Thomas Hawerbrook.'

"At these words she shivered again.

"'Do you see him?'

"'Yes, yes,' she answered, in a gasping voice, 'I see him.'

"'Where is he?'

"'Up there, in the depths of the cavern—dead.'

"'Dead!' said the doctor; 'how?'

"'The spider! oh, the spider!'

"'Calm yourself,' said the doctor, who was very pale. 'Tell us clearly.'

"'The spider holds him by the throat—in the depths of the cavern—under the rock—enveloped in its web—Ah!'

"Dr. Weber glanced round on the people, who, bending forward, with eyes starting out of their heads, listened in horror.

"Then he continued: 'You see him?'

"'I see him.'

"'And the spider. Is it a big one?'

"'O Master, never, never, have I seen such a big one. Neither on the banks of the Mocaris, nor in the swamps of Konanama. It is as large as my body.'

"There was a long silence. Everybody waited with livid face and hair on end. Only the doctor kept calm. Passing his hand two or three times over the woman's forehead, he recommenced his questions. Agatha described how Sir Thomas's death happened.

"'He was bathing in the lake of the source. The spider saw his bare back from behind. It had been fasting for a long time, and was hungry. Then it saw Sir Thomas's arm on the water. All of a sudden it rushed out, put its claws round the commodore's neck. He cried out, "Mon Dieu, Mon Dieu." The spider stung him and went back, and Sir Thomas fell into the water and died. Then the spider returned, spun its web round him, and swam slowly, gently back to the extremity of the cavern, drawing Sir Thomas after it by the thread attached to its own body.'

"I was still sitting in the chimney corner, overwhelmed with fright. The doctor turned to me.

"'Is it true, Frantz, that the commodore was going to bathe?'

"'Yes, cousin.'

"'At what time?'

"'At four o'clock.'

"'At four o'clock? It was very hot then, was it not?'

"'Yes, oh, yes.'

"'That's it. The monster was not afraid to come out then.'

"He spoke a few unintelligible words, and turned to the peasants.

"'My friends,' he cried, 'that is where the mass of *débris* and those skeletons come from. It is the spider which has frightened away your visitors, and ruined you all. It is there hidden in its web, entrapping its prey into the depths of the cavern. Who can say the number of its victims?'

"He rushed impetuously from the house, and all the woodcutters hurried after him.

"'Bring fagots, bring fagots!' he cried.

"Ten minutes later two immense carts, laden with fagots, slowly mounted the hill, a long file of woodcutters followed, with hatchets on their shoulders. My guardian and I walked in front, holding the horses by the bridle, while the moon lent a vague, melancholy light to the funereal procession.

"At the entrance of the cavern the *cortège* stopped. The torches were lighted and the crowd advanced. The limpid water flowed over the sand, reflecting the blue light of the resinous torches, the rays of which illuminated the tops of the dark, overhanging pines on the rocks above us.

"IT RUSHED OUT AND PUT ITS CLAWS AROUND THE COMMODORE'S NECK."

"'It is here you must unload,' said the doctor. 'We must block up the entrance of the cavern.'

"It was not without a feeling of dread that they commenced to execute his order. The fagots fell from the tops of the carts, and the men piled them up before the opening, placing some stakes against them to prevent their being carried away by the water. Towards midnight the opening was literally closed by the fagots. The hissing water below them flowed right and left over the moss, but those on the top were perfectly dry.

"Then Dr. Weber took a lighted torch, and himself set fire to the pile. The flames spread from twig to twig, and rose towards the sky, preceded by dense clouds of smoke. It was a wild, strange sight, and the woods lighted by the crackling flames had a weird effect. Thick volumes of smoke proceeded from the cavern, while the men standing round, gloomy and motionless, waited with their eyes fixed on the opening. As for me, though I trembled from head to foot, I could not withdraw my gaze.

"We waited quite a quarter of an hour, and Dr. Weber began to be impatient, when a black object, with long, crooked claws, suddenly appeared in the shadow, and then threw itself forward towards the opening. One of the men, fearing that it would leap over the fire, threw his hatchet, and aimed at the creature so well that, for an instant, the blood which flowed from its wound half-quenched the fire, but soon the flame revived, and the horrible insect was consumed.

"Evidently driven by the heat, the spider had taken refuge in its den. Then, suffocated by the smoke, it had returned to the charge, and rushed into the middle of the flames. The body of the horrible creature was as large as a man's, reddish violet in colour, and most repulsive in appearance.

"That, Mr. Fritz, is the strange event which destroyed the reputation of Spinbronn. I can swear to the exactitude of my story, but it would be impossible for me to give you an explanation. Nevertheless, admitting that the high temperature of certain thermal springs furnishes the same conditions of existence as the burning climate of Africa and South America, it is not unreasonable to suppose that insects, subject to its influence, can attain an enormous development.

"Whatever may have been the cause, my guardian decided that it would be useless to attempt to resuscitate the waters of Spinbronn, so he sold his house, and returned to America with his negress and his collection."

"ONE OF THE MEN THREW HIS HATCHET."

CAVALANCI'S CURSE

By

Henry A. Hering

1675

CAVALANCI DA SALÒ was one day in his workshop opposite the old Palace of the Podestà in Brescia. On the shelves around were numerous examples of his work, their rich gold varnish, for which he was afterwards so famous, glistening in the sunlight. But Cavalanci sat on a bench disconsolate.

"Diavolo," he at length exclaimed, letting a half-purfled scroll fall unheeded from his hand, "is this to be the end of Brescian dreams? Here is music lying dead, enough to charm the ears of half Italy, and yet, forsooth, he who wants viol or violin must needs hasten to Cremona for the imitations of the Amanti, Guarneri, or of Antonio Stradivari. Times are indeed changed that I, Gasparo's grandson, must offer my work and find no purchasers, unless it be the mountebanks of the village fairs. Truly, I pay dearly for a father's folly. Instead of roaming Western seas, why stayed he not at home to earn the mantle which fell on Maggini's shoulders, from whom I had to learn all a father should have taught? And his son Carlo, in like manner, is content to merce flimsy silk rather than pursue immortal work. We are ingrates here, while in Cremona loyalty, at any rate, thrives, and son succeeds father to Brescian hurt."

Then he rose and paced the room savagely, kicking what tools or wood fell in his way.

"But what mends it," he muttered, "mouthing of fallen hopes? Present claims are more urgent. Sixteen lire were due to Carlo for rent more than a month ago. His grace expires to-morrow, and well I know no memories of the past will stay his hand. My stock and tools alone are worth a hundred lire, therefore old Tubal would give me ten. Perchance I might haggle the whole sixteen, and then Corpo di Bacco, that it should come to this!—Gasparo's grandson an outcast, while Guarneri and Stradivari, base copiers, flourish! By all that is unholy, I swear I'd sell my soul to the Evil One himself could I but outdo them in fame."

There was a blinding flash of lightning, followed by a fearful thunder peal, and then, sulphurous darkness filled the shop. When light came Cavalanci was conscious of the presence of another. He half-hoped, half-dreaded, to see the Devil on whom he had so impiously called—but it was seemingly only a chance customer. Yet it was afterwards said that he was something more, for Cavalanci paid his rent next day, the fame of his instruments increased forthwith, and he died a rich, though not a happy, man.

1875

"Dear Sir,"—the letter ran,—"We are instructed by Messrs Ware and Foster, executors under the will of the late Mr Josephus Wilson, to intimate to you that the testator bequeathed to you his violin. We are send-

ing it you by special messenger herewith, and will thank you to sign inclosed acknowledgment of receipt.

"Yours respectfully,

"DANES AND DANES."

I handed the letter to Dawson.

"Well, I've heard of heaping coals of fire on your enemy's head," he remarked, when he had read it, "but I never came across such a remarkable instance of the operation as this. Are you going to take it?"

"Why not? I will accept it as the peace-offering for which it was obviously intended. As a matter of fact, a post-mortem reconciliation was the only one I would have agreed to. Yes, certainly I will take it."

So I signed the receipt and accepted the bequest.

I undid the parcel and took the violin from its battered case.

"Why, it's as yellow as a guinea," I exclaimed, in surprise; I had never seen such a light one.

"Wilson was uncommonly proud of the colour," said Dawson, "and he was simply infatuated with the instrument. Latterly they couldn't tear him away from it. He never would play it before anyone, though. That was another of his cranks. He used to shut himself up with it all day long, and play both it and the piano simultaneously."

I expressed my doubts as to this possibility.

"At any rate, Wilson did it. I've heard him myself, though I never actually saw the operation." Saying which, Dawson sat down on the stool and resumed the interrupted nocturne.

Then a remarkable thing happened. He had not played half a dozen chords before a long-drawn-out note came from the violin I was still fingering. I nearly dropped it in my amazement.

"Here, stop that," said Dawson, wheeling round.

"I did not touch a string. It made that noise of itself."

"Humbug! Don't do it again, that's all," he replied, snappishly, resuming his interrupted piece.

Again, as he struck the keyboard, the violin sounded. Without stopping Dawson turned his head, and when he saw me a couple of yards away from the violin, his expression of annoyance changed to one of open-eyed amazement, for he was still playing the piano, and the notes that continued to proceed from the violin were in harmony with his piece.

I UNDID THE CASE AND TOOK THE VIOLIN FROM ITS CASE.

He stopped suddenly, and with him the violin.

"Did you hear that?" he asked, in a scared voice.

I was too much astonished to reply, and we both stared at the instrument for some minutes in absolute silence.

"It's a sympathetic fiddle," I said, at length, for the mere sake of saying something.

"It seems a bit that way," replied Dawson, drily, "but I never heard one so sympathetic as all that."

He turned round to the piano and commenced afresh, and again the violin joined in. This time Dawson did not stop, and the duet continued in absolute harmony.

I bent over the instrument. The varnish seemed brighter than before. The sun glinted topaz lights upon it, with changing gleams of purple and brown. The strings quivered as though touched by an unseen bow. I felt a cold shiver run down my

spine as I watched; it was altogether too uncanny.

The piano stopped: simultaneously the violin. Dawson wheeled round and gazed at it.

"Well, of all the extraordinary things!" he ejaculated. "What on earth does it mean?"

"Let's see if it will follow me," I said, irrelevantly, taking his seat.

Once I learnt to play on the piano, and I still remember the treble of two tunes—"Haydn's Surprise" and "God bless the Prince of Wales." I played the first, but the violin remained impassive. Maybe the bass I improvised puzzled it; at any rate, it did not join in. Then I tried the second air, and with no better success. Then Dawson played with his right hand only, and it struck in at once.

"It isn't particularly respectful to its owner," I remarked. "It seems to me, Dawson, this fiddle has taken an altogether unnecessary liking for you. Wilson should have left it to you instead."

"If you want to part with it I shall be glad to offer it a home," said Dawson with what appeared to me indelicate haste.

"You can take it away now, Dawson," I rejoined. "I want no unwilling visitor here."

He seemed singularly pleased with the present, and he left me that evening with the fiddle-case in his hand.

Immediately after this I made a long foreign tour, and it was nearly twelve months before I saw him again. I wrote advising him of my return, and asked him to look me up, but as he neither did so nor wrote, I called upon him.

He lived in rooms in Bloomsbury. The servant told me he was in, but added that she did not think he would see me.

"Is he ill?" I asked.

"No, sir, but he's playing; and he won't ever see anyone then."

This was a new development in his character. Telling the servant it would be all right, I made my way upstairs.

Yes, Dawson was undoubtedly playing, and someone was helping him, for there were piano and violin.

I tapped and then turned the handle, but the door was locked. I knocked loudly and called to Dawson to open it.

There was a moment's pause—or rather the piano stopped, but the violin went on.

"Who's there?" shouted Dawson, in a peevish voice.

"Saunders!"

"Wait a minute," was the curt reply; and on the piano galloped as if to overtake its companion. I don't think it accomplished this, for the violin shrieked as if in anger at the delay, and the piano rushed on blindly and apologetically. Then in a fierce crescendo of disgust the fiddle ceased. The piano put on the brake, slowed down, and stopped.

"WHAT'S THE MATTER, OLD MAN?"

The door opened and Dawson bade me enter. He was alone.

"Where's your friend?" I asked; and then, catching sight of a yellow violin on the table, I suddenly remembered I had just been listening to another duet between Dawson and my self-acting legacy.

Dawson made no reply, but sank into a chair and wiped the perspiration from his face with trembling hands. He seemed altogether out of condition.

"What's the matter, old man?" I asked. "You don't seem well."

Dawson gloomily pointed to the fiddle.

"That's what's the matter," he replied, with a ghastly smile.

"What, my sympathetic fiddle? You don't mean to say you've had too much of it already? I'll take it back if you don't like it."

"You can't take it back. It's a Cavalanci"

"Well, it won't bite, will it?'

"When a man once gets a Cavalanci and plays to it, it sticks to him like the Old Man of the Sea, and no power on earth can take it away from him," said Dawson, sententiously.

"Humbug!"

"Look at the wreck I am," he replied. "There's no humbug about that, is there? And I've only the Cavalanci to thank for it."

"You do look bad," I admitted. "But tell me all about it. What do you mean by a Cavalanci?"

Dawson leaned back in his chair and gazed at the ceiling

"Cavalanci," said he, slowly, "was a competitor of Stradivarius, and he determined to outshine his rival. According to the legend, which I for one now implicitly believe, he sold his soul to the Devil to gain his ends. His instruments became all the rage, till it was found that their owners invariably went mad, as I am going. Then the demand ceased and bonfires were made of them whenever possible. I have learnt that there are only four extant now, and this cursed thing is one of them."

"Why not burn that as well, if it annoys you?"

"I dare not. Its owner can only destroy his Cavalanci on his death-bed. Wilson could have done it, but as he owed you a grudge he passed it on to you instead. Would to Heaven you'd been the first to play in its diabolic presence."

"I'll destroy it, if you won't," I said. I grabbed at it, and was about to break it across my knee when Dawson sprang forward with a terrible cry.

"No, no, Saunders. You'd kill me if you did it." He caught the instrument in his hands and huddled it to him as if it were a child.

It was a painful spectacle. I watched him pityingly.

"Saunders," he said, at length, "you don't know what a time of it I've had since I got hold of this infernal thing."

"You seemed pleased enough to get it at the time."

"And so I was. It seemed scarcely credible, but as I played with the thing in your room, an overwhelming desire for possession came over me. I pretty well asked for it, and if you had refused to give it me, I think I should have taken it by main force. I simply craved for that fiddle."

"Then if you wanted it so badly, why does its possession worry you?"

"Because, Saunders, it makes my life a perfect misery. Man, I'm its slave. It takes the lead now. When it wishes to play—and it is always wishing it—I have to accompany it wherever I am. Distance makes no difference, and I have to play till it is satisfied. I found that out about a week after I got it. I was at the Venables'. In the middle of dinner I felt a terrible longing stealing over me. I wanted to play. I tried to control myself, but play I must or go mad. Scarcely apologizing, I left the table, ran into the drawing-room, and sat down at the piano. I don't know what I played, but the moment my fingers touched the keys I was filled with a feeling of content and delight. I was still playing when the ladies entered. Mrs. Venables must have thought me mad, for I did not stop. She sent for her husband, who came and asked me to return to the table. I nodded to him and went on. Suddenly my feelings changed, and I was only aware that I was making a terrible fool of myself. The full force of my social enormity fell upon me, and, livid with confusion, I made some incoherent apology and fled from the house.

"From that night my reputation for eccentricity was firmly established, and I have added to it from time to time, for I am never safe, and can go nowhere without the danger of a similar occurrence. The following Sunday I went to the Wilmers'. There were plenty of delightful people there, and for a time I forgot my wretched position. Suddenly the same mad impulse came over me. There was a long-haired German at the piano, but it didn't matter. I flicked him off the stool, and, surrounded by a gaping crowd, went through Heaven knows what composition. But I did not care. I was happy. Then when my master was satisfied again the terrible awakening came, and I flung myself out of the room like a madman—they all thought I was. It's just fiendish, Saunders. I rarely can go anywhere without making a fool of myself. It's just maddening to think of the ignominy of it all."

"But, my dear chap, why don't you lose it? Put it in an express train, with a fictitious address, and wash your hands of it."

"I've tried it," said Dawson, wearily. "Before I knew all I have since learnt from bitter experience, I packed it off by P and O boat, addressed to the Grand Llama of

"I FLICKED HIM OFF THE STOOL."

Tibet. I thought he might be able to deal with it if he ever got it. I suffered agonies from the separation, and it must have been very lively on the journey. For I had to play to it just the same. And then, after all, it came back to me marked 'Gone—Left no address,' and I don't know what I hadn't to pay for carriage. How they found out the sender, goodness only knows. I have left it in trains, but it *never fails* to come back, and I have always suffered during its absence. I took it to a pawnshop and destroyed the ticket, but the yearning for it was so fearful I had to get it out by making a false declaration about the ticket before a magistrate. I can't bear to be away from it. When I play its accompaniments a feeling of intense happiness and satisfaction steals over me, but afterwards the sense of the ignominy of it all is terrible. I can do nothing in life but minister to the caprices of a Cavalanci violin—and finally go crazy."

Just as he ended there was a tap at the door, and the servant appeared with a parcel. It was a disreputable-looking object. The paper was ragged and dirty, the string knotted and loosely tied.

Dawson looked at it doubtfully.

"Are you sure it's for me?" he asked. "Who brought it?"

"He looked like a circus man, sir," replied the maid, "and he was most particular in saying it was for you."

"A circus man," muttered Dawson, as he tore off the wrapper. A violin-case was exposed to view. He opened it, and then gave vent to a yell of dismay. I looked at the contents. It was a yellow violin.

"What, another Cavalanci!" I exclaimed.

"It looks like it," said Dawson, bitterly. "One's quite enough for any family. I don't know to whom I'm indebted for this particular attention, but I should like to wring his precious neck." Then he banged the lid to.

"Here, Saunders," said he, "you can do me this good turn at any rate. Take this outside—leave it in a 'bus or pitch it into a dust bin, do anything you like with it, only take it away, and it will work its passage to its owner. But do it at once. I may have to play any minute to satisfy my own fiddle, and I don't know what complication would result. Take it, man, this minute."

To satisfy him I look hold of the thing, put on my hat and opened the door. I nearly fell over the servant, who was about to knock; behind her was a tall, fur-coated man whom I did not remember to have seen before. And, good heavens! in his hand was a violin-case! The place seemed infested with fiddles.

I was brushing past him, but he laid a heavy hand on my shoulder and forced me back into the room. He himself followed, closed the door, and placed himself before it.

"Excuse my roughness, sir," said he, with a strong nasal twang, "but air you James Dawson?"

"No," I replied; "that's the gentleman," pointing to Dawson, who was standing with

eyes staring out of his head, fixed on the stranger's violin-case.

"Don't stay, Saunders," he almost shrieked, "take it away. There's not a moment to be lost."

But the new-comer effectually barred the way.

Dawson was almost beside himself. He grabbed hold of the poker, but the stranger coolly threw his case on the table and from his breast produced a tiny revolver.

"Two can play at that perticler game, sir," said he, "and I reckon the bettings on my side to-day."

And there we stood.

"Perhaps you'll kindly explain what you mean by this intrusion?" I said, hotly.

"No objection at all," said the American, for so I judged him to be. "I'd have done so at once if James Dawson hadn't been so demonstrative. You see, Colonel, it's thish-yer way. That infernal cuss, Cavalanci——"

Again the door opened, and this time a heavily muffled foreigner with spectacles and long hair appeared, and, ye gods! he also had a violin-case.

"Goot," said the latest arrival, "I see dat I am joost in de nick off time. Goot evenings, shentlemens all," and with this he placed his case and hat on the table and proceeded to divest himself of his wraps.

"I REACK IN THE BETTINGS ON MY SIDE TO-DAY"

"Bravo," said the Yankee, "I'm glad to see you, Bloomstein. We are now complete the four extant Cavalanci and the four owners."

"I'm not an owner," I said, in alarm, for I did not at all like the turn things were taking.

"You're the Baboo from Benares, ain't you?" asked the American.

"No, sir, I'm not. I'm a friend of Mr. Dawson. I was simply calling upon him, and I think I'll go now. I don't wish to intrude on your proceedings."

"No, you don't, sir," said he, turning the key in the door and pocketing it. "Not till I'm clear on the subject. Whose fiddle's that?" pointing to the one I held.

"It's just come in a parcel," said I.

"Allow me to look at it, please," said the Yankee, still toying with his revolver.

He placed the case on the table, opened it, and drew forth the violin. Underneath it was a letter.

"Ah, thishyer's thingumy's fist," said he, "and no doubt it will explain. Here, Colonel, you look like an Oriental scholar, so, perhaps, you'll decipher it." And he handed me the letter.

The handwriting was like a copy-book heading, but the composition was peculiar. This is what I read:—

"Honoured Sir,—It mortifies me deeply not to intrude at happy conversazione. I have made blue in the Wisky of Scotchland the rupees obligingly forwarded so there is no ability in me to pay for a transit. To-day the Gangees receives a solid addition but my fiddle of spanking yellow will reach you timely by a holy gentleman of Shoreditch.—Faithful and truly, "DONNEAGEE JUGGERNAUT."

"The cur!" exclaimed the Yankee, when I had finished reading this singular epistle. "Why didn't he destroy his Cavalanci before he committed suicide instead of passing it on here? Someone will have to own it or the whole scheme will fall through. Here, Colonel," addressing me, "you're the odd man out. You've got to take possession of that Cavalanci."

"I beg to decline the honour," I replied, firmly.

The Yankee lifted his revolver threateningly.

"Nein, nein," broke in the German, "do not shet his blood. Egsblain de matter to de shentlemans und he vill understand."

"Right," said the Yankee, seating himself astride of a chair, with his back to the

"I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU, BLOOMSTEIN."

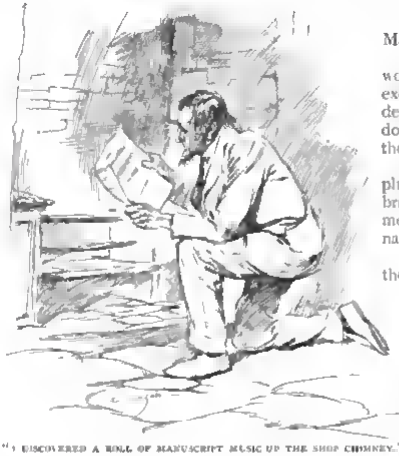
door, revolver still in hand. "It's thishyer way, and maybe if I had told you at first I should have had a warmer reception from James Dawson. My name is Masters—Simpson K. Masters, of Tontine, Dak. I am the unfortunate owner of this instrument, and I need hardly tell you what its possession entails."

A groan broke from the German. "Ja, ja, dat is so," he said.

"It was left me about five years ago by a lady who had lost her breach of promise action against me, and when I fully realized that I should probably grow woolly if I could not get rid of it, I determined to devote what leisure the infernal instrument left me to making inquiries about Cavalanci and his curse—for, as most poisons have their antidote, I reckoned the same arrangement held good for curses. I spent all last year at Brescia, where these things were manufactured. I bought up every vestige of a relic of Cavalanci, took his shop for a spell of 999 years, and was prepared to stay my lease out unless I got what I wanted. I searched every corner and cranny of that air shop after the manner prescribed by the late E. A. Poe. I spent days in the chimneys, and wasted a power of time in the roof; I took his old tester-bed to bits, and probed every inch of its wood, and worked at the anatomy of the building till the authorities sent word it was likely to fall, but all to no purpose.

"I had about given up hope when I chanced upon a lineal descendant of Cavalanci—a decayed Italian nobleman in the retail macaroni business. From him I learnt of the existence of a tradition that Cavalanci on his death-bed was annoyed to think of the trouble he had started, and got the Devil to promise that, when a combined band of all his fiddles played a certain air, the Curse should be removed. Why the Old Gentleman agreed to this arrangement my informant couldn't guess, unless he did it to soothe his friend's last moments, no doubt feeling pretty certain that the combined band would never play till he'd got a lot of fun out of the Curse.

"It sounded like a cock-and-bull tale, but the Italian nobleman seemed so certain about it, and was so much hurt when I doubted him, that I sort of began to believe in it myself. As luck had it, I had discovered a roll of manuscript music up the shop chimney, of which I had taken no particular account, but which now assumed considerable importance. As I had no piano handy in those days, I had been playing to my fiddle on a concertina, and it rather seemed to take to the instrument, so the very next time it wanted me to accompany it, I started to work through that bunch of tunes on the same article. Now, whether it was the concertina it suddenly took a dislike to, or whether the tunes didn't agree with it, I don't pretend to say, but it turned sulky and wouldn't take a hand in noway, that is until I came to one particular air. It was a weird affair—a sort of mixture of the 'Dead March in Saul' and 'Hail, Columbia!' It



"I DISCOVERED A ROLL OF MANUSCRIPT MUSIC UP THE SHOP CHIMNEY."

struck in from the first note in a nasty nagging way, and if ever a fiddle played unwillingly that one did. It lagged behind and put in commas and full-stops where they were not wanted, and in every other bar it screeched out a note of exclamation that wasn't down in my part. But I took it out of that Cavalanci, gentlemen, and made it sit up, for when I'd run through the ditty I started it all over again, and that instrument followed me like a whipped cur. And then another remarkable thing happened. It changed colour—from yellow to orange and then to a dirty brown. I guess I'd touched it up at last; and when I saw this I closed the concert and gave that Italian nobleman an order for macaroni that surprised him.

"Although it regained its old colour, I was firmly convinced from the behaviour of my violin that the nobleman was right, and that if I could get the whole extant Cavalanci together the Curse could be broken; and the last few months I have spent in tracing Bloomstein, the Baboo, and our friend James Dawson, and in making arrangements for this happy meeting. I thought it better to keep the notion from you, James, until now, for fear of incredulity on your part. And now, Colonel," turning to me, "you must assume possession of that Baboo's fiddle. It won't take ten minutes to break that air Curse."

"But if it doesn't break?" I urged.

"It will break," said Simpson K. Masters.

"Saunders," said Dawson, who had worked himself up into a state of great excitement, "I implore you to help us destroy this Curse. You owe it to me to do so, for it's all through you I got into the trouble at all."

"I'm awfully sorry, Dawson," I replied, "but I cannot. I was very strictly brought up, and my family would not like me to mix myself up in anything of this nature. You must respect my scruples."

"And you must respect this, sir," said the Yankee, holding his revolver at an extremely unpleasant angle.

There was no help for it. "All right," I said, "I'll do it for my old friend Dawson's sake. Nothing else would have induced me. But I can't play any instrument," I added, triumphantly.

"Mein Gott!" exclaimed the German.

"Why, I have heard you play 'Haydn's Surprise,'" said Dawson.

"Only on one finger," I modestly urged.

"Try it, sir, with your toes if you like," said the Yankee. "And I shall be surprised if that fiddle don't respond. A Cavalanci ain't partic'ler when it wants an owner."

I sat down at the piano and played what I knew of the air. A shadow of despair came over Dawson's face, and the German put his fingers in his ears, but Simpson K. Masters encouraged me to persevere.

"Keep it up, Colonel," said he. "Put the pedal on, it'll help you round the corners."

Before I had played a dozen notes a sound came from the table.

"Hurrah!" cried Dawson.

"The Baboo's fiddle has bit," said Simpson K. Masters.

Sure enough the violin had joined in, and I turned cold at the thought that I was now the owner of a Cavalanci violin.

I played all I knew of the air and then stopped. The violin ceased as well.

"It would not let you off so easily in a week or two, Colonel," said the Yankee, grimly. "Now, gentlemen, here we are—the four extant Cavalanci and the four owners. All we have to do is to run through Cavalanci's Antidote and our troubles are over."

With eager impatience Dawson sat down at the piano, the German produced a flageolet, and Masters a flute.

"What am I to play?" said I, in dismay. "You mustn't leave me out."

"Haven't you got anything, James?" said the Yankee. "A drum would do."

"I've nothing that I know of," replied Dawson.

"Then we must send out for something."

"I have it," said Dawson. "I bought a triangle some years ago, and ought to have it still."

"A driangle—goot!" said Mr. Bloomstein, and Masters nodded his satisfaction.

After some little delay the triangle was found, and when I had received a few instructions on the manipulation of this simple instrument Dawson sat down, and the quartet or rather octet commenced.

I don't think it was a success from a musical point of view, for we were all excited. Even the flute was off-colour. Still, we hung together pretty well, and stuck to the notes as well as we could. I tapped my triangle with considerable effect.

The four Cavalanci joined in from the first note. It was a weird and mournful composition, and the violins kept up the pathos of the thing with remarkable effect. It was like the prolonged wail of a soul in torment, with sudden outbursts of Satanic joviality. Our feelings were strung to the highest pitch, for we were playing for our lives. The sweat rolled off Bloomstein's face, and Dawson's hands trembled like aspen leaves. Simpson K. Masters tried to appear unconcerned and failed.

The others were intent on the notes, but as I played from ear I was able to observe the fiddles. I could feel my heart thumping as I watched them. Would the "Antidote" act, or was it all a delusion of the Yankee's? Was I not saddled for life with a fearful monstrosity which would finally undermine my reason?

Ha! it was touching them. Masters was right. They were changing colour! They were a rich yellow when we started, but with every bar their hue deepened through varying shades of orange, brown, walnut, darker, darker still, till at last four coal black violins lay upon the table. As the final bars came their notes shrieked out as if in terrible protest, and as the last chord was struck sixteen strings snapped with one crack.

"Gentlemen," said the Yankee, "I guess Signor Cavalanci's Curse is off."

"SIGNOR CAVALANCI'S CURSE IS OFF."

By E. Nesbit.

I.—THE BOOK OF BEASTS.

HE happened to be building a Palace when the news came, and he left all the bricks kicking about the floor for Nurse to clear up—but then the news was rather remarkable news. You see, there was a knock at the front door and voices talking downstairs, and Lionel thought it was the man come to see about the gas which had not been allowed to be lighted since the day when Lionel made a swing by tying his skipping-rope to the gas bracket.

And then, quite suddenly, Nurse came in, and said, "Master Lionel, dear, they've come to fetch you to go and be King."

Then she made haste to change his smock and to wash his face and hands and brush his hair, and all the time she was doing it Lionel kept wriggling and fidgeting and saying, "Oh, don't, Nurse," and, "I'm sure my ears are quite clean," or, "Never mind my hair, it's all right," and "That'll do."

"You're going on as if you was going to be an eel instead of a King," said Nurse.

The minute Nurse let go for a moment Lionel bolted off without waiting for his clean handkerchief, and in the drawing-room there were two very grave-looking gentlemen in red robes with fur, and gold coronets with velvet sticking up out of the middle like the cream in the very expensive tarts.

They bowed low to Lionel, and the gravest one said—

"Sire, your great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, the King of this country, is dead, and now you have got to come and be King."

"Yes, please, sir," said Lionel, "when does it begin?"

"You will be crowned this afternoon," said the grave gentleman who was not quite so grave-looking as the other.

"Would you like me to bring Nurse, or what time would you like me to be fetched, and hadn't I better put on my velvet suit with the lace collar?" said Lionel, who had often been out to tea.

"Your Nurse will be removed to the Palace later. No, never mind about changing your suit, the Royal robes will cover all that up"

The grave gentlemen led the way to a coach with eight white horses, which was drawn up in front of the house where Lionel lived. It was No. 7, on the left hand side of the street as you go up.

Lionel ran upstairs at the last minute, and he kissed Nurse and said —

"Thank you for washing me. I wish I'd let you do the other ear No—there's no time now Give me the hanky Good-bye, Nurse"

"Good-bye, ducky," said Nurse; "be a good little King now, and say 'please' and 'thank you,' and remember to pass the cake to the little girls, and don't have more than two helps of anything"

So off went Lionel to be made a King He had never expected to be a King any more than you have, so it was all quite new to him—so new that he had never even thought of it And as the coach went through the town he had to bite his tongue to be quite sure it was real, because if his tongue was real it showed he wasn't dreaming. Half an hour before he had been building with bricks in the nursery, and now—the streets were all fluttering with flags; every window was crowded with people waving handkerchiefs and scattering flowers; there were scarlet soldiers everywhere along the pavements, and all the bells of all the churches were ringing like mad, and like a great song to the music of their ringing he heard thousands of people shouting, "Long live Lionel! Long live our little King!"

He was a little sorry at first that he had not put on his best clothes, but he soon forgot to think about that. If he had been a girl he would very likely have bothered about it the whole time

As they went along, the grave gentlemen, who were the Chancellor and the Prime Minister, explained the things which Lionel did not understand.

"I thought we were a Republic," said Lionel "I'm sure there hasn't been a King for some time."

"Sire, your great-great-great-great-great-grandfather's death happened when my grandfather was a little boy," said the Prime Minister, "and since then your loyal people have been saving up to buy you a crown—so much a week, you know, according to people's means—sixpence a week from those who have first rate pocket-money, down to a half penny a week from those who haven't so much You know it's the rule that the crown must be paid for by the people"

"But hadn't my great-great-however-much-it-is-grandfather a crown?"

"Yes, but he sent it to be tinned over, for fear of vanity, and he had had all the jewels taken out, and sold them to buy books. He was a strange man—a very good King he was, but he had his faults—he was fond of books. Almost with his latest breath he sent the crown to be tinned—and he never lived to pay the tinsmith's bill"

Here the Prime Minister wiped away a tear, and just then the carriage stopped and Lionel was taken out of the carriage to be crowned. Being crowned is much more tiring work than you would suppose, and by the time it was over, and Lionel had worn the Royal robes for an hour or two and had had his hand kissed by everybody whose business it was to do it, he was quite worn out, and was very glad to get into the Palace nursery

Nurse was there, and tea was ready seedy cake and plummy cake, and jam and hot buttered toast, and the prettiest china with red and gold and blue flowers on it, and real tea, and as many cups of it as you liked. After tea Lionel said —

"I think I should like a book. Will you get me one, Nurse?"

"Bless the child," said Nurse, "you don't suppose you've lost the use of your legs with just being a King? Run along, do, and get your books yourself"

So Lionel went down into the library. The Prime Minister and the Chancellor were there, and when Lionel came in they bowed very low, and were beginning to ask Lionel most politely what on earth he was coming bothering for now—when Lionel cried out —

"Oh, what a worldful of books! Are they yours?"

"They are yours, your Majesty," answered the Chancellor "They were the property of the late King, your great-great——"

"Yes, I know," Lionel interrupted "Well, I shall read them all I love to read. I am so glad I learned to read"

"If I might venture to advise your Majesty," said the Prime Minister, "I should *not* read these books. "Your great——"

"Yes," interrupted Lionel, quickly

"He was a very good King—oh, yes, really a very superior King in his way, but he was a little—well, strange."

"Mad?" asked Lionel, cheerfully.

"No, no"—both the gentlemen were sincerely shocked. "Not mad, but if I may express it so, he was—er—too clever by half. And I should not like a little King of mine to have anything to do with his books."

Lionel looked puzzled.

"The fact is," the Chancellor went on, twisting his red beard in an agitated way, "your great——"

"Go on," said Lionel.

"Was *called* a wizard."

"But he wasn't?"

"Of course not—a most worthy King was your great——"

"I see."

"But I wouldn't touch his books."

"Just this one," cried Lionel, laying his hands on the cover of a great brown book that lay on the study table. It had gold patterns on the brown leather, and gold clasps with turquoises and rubies in the twists of them, and gold corners, so that the leather should not wear out too quickly.

"I *must* look at this one," Lionel said, for on the back in big letters he read, "The Book of Beasts."

The Chancellor said, "Don't be a silly little King."

But Lionel had got the gold clasps undone, and he opened the first page, and there was a beautiful Butterfly all red, and brown, and yellow, and blue, so beautifully painted that it looked as if it were alive.

"There," said Lionel, "isn't that lovely? Why——"

"THE CHANCELLOR GAVE THE KING A GOOD SHAKING."

But as he spoke the beautiful Butterfly fluttered its many-coloured wings on the yellow old page of the book, and flew up and out of the window.

"Well!" said the Prime Minister, as soon as he could speak for the lump of wonder that had got into his throat and tried to choke him, "that's magic, that is."

But before he had spoken the King had turned the next page, and there was a shining bird complete and beautiful in every blue feather of him. Under him was written, "Blue Bird of Paradise," and while the King gazed enchanted at the charming picture the Blue Bird fluttered his wings on the yellow page and spread them and flew out of the book.

Then the Prime Minister snatched the book away from the King and shut it up on the blank page where the bird had been, and put it on a very high shelf. And the Chancellor gave the King a good shaking, and said:—

"You're a naughty, disobedient little King," and was very angry indeed.

"I don't see that I've done any harm," said Lionel. He hated being shaken, as all boys do, he would much rather have been slapped.

"No harm?" said the Chancellor. "Ah—but what do you know about it? That's the question. How do you know what might have been on the next page—a snake or a worm, or a centipede or a revolutionist, or something like that."

"Well, I'm sorry if I've vexed you," said Lionel. "Come, let's kiss and be friends." So he kissed the Prime Minister, and they

settled down for a nice quiet game of noughts and crosses, while the Chancellor went to add up his accounts

But when Lionel was in bed he could not sleep for thinking of the book, and when the full moon was shining with all her might and light he got up and crept down to the library and climbed up and got the "Book of Beasts"

He took it outside on to the terrace, where the moonlight was as bright as day, and he opened the book, and saw the empty pages with "Butterfly" and "Blue Bird of Paradise" underneath, and then he turned the next page. There was some sort of red thing sitting under a palm tree, and under it was written "Dragon." The Dragon did not move, and the King shut up the book rather quickly and went back to bed.

But the next day he wanted another look, so he got the book out into the garden, and when he undid the clasps with the rubies and turquoises, the book opened all by itself at the picture with "Dragon" underneath, and the sun shone full on the page And then, quite suddenly, a great Red Dragon came out of the book, and spread vast scarlet wings and flew away across the garden to the far hills, and Lionel was left with the empty page before him, for the page was quite empty except for the green palm tree and the yellow desert, and the little streaks of red where the paint brush had gone outside the outline of the Red Dragon

And then Lionel felt that he had indeed done it. He had not been King twenty-four hours, and already he had let loose a Red Dragon to worry his faithful subjects' lives out. And they had been saving up so long to buy him a crown, and everything!

Lionel began to cry.

Then the Chancellor and the Prime Minister and the Nurse all came running to see what was the matter And when they saw the book they understood, and the Chancellor said:—

"You naughty little King! Put him to bed, Nurse, and let him think over what he's done"

"Perhaps, my Lord," said the Prime

THE DRAGON FLEW AWAY ACROSS THE VALLEY

Minister, "we'd better first find out just what he *has* done."

Then Lionel, in floods of tears, said —

"It's a Red Dragon, and it's gone flying away to the hills, and I *am* so sorry, and, oh, do forgive me!"

But the Prime Minister and the Chancellor had other things to think of than forgiving Lionel. They hurried off to consult the police and see what could be done. Everyone did what they could. They sat on committees and stood on guard, and lay in wait for the Dragon, but he stayed up in the hills, and there was nothing more to be done. The faithful Nurse, meanwhile, did not neglect her duty. Perhaps she did more than anyone else, for she slapped the King and put him to bed without his tea, and when it got dark she would not give him a candle to read by.

"You are a naughty little King," she said, "and nobody will love you."

Next day the Dragon was still quiet, though the more poetic of Lionel's subjects could see the redness of the Dragon shining through the green trees quite plainly. So Lionel put on his crown and sat on his throne and said he wanted to make some laws.

And I need hardly say that though the Prime Minister and the Chancellor and the Nurse might have the very poorest opinion of Lionel's private judgment, and might even slap him and send him to bed, the minute he got on his throne and set his crown on his head, he became infallible—which means that everything he said was right, and that he couldn't possibly make a mistake. So when he said —

"There is to be a law forbidding people to open books in school or elsewhere" —he had the support of at least half of his subjects, and the other half — the grown up half—pretended to think he was quite right.

Then he made a law that everyone should always have enough to eat. And this pleased everyone except the ones who had always had too much.

And when several other nice new laws were written down he went home and made mud houses and was very happy. And he said to his Nurse —

"People will love me now I've made such a lot of pretty new laws for them."

But Nurse said: "Don't count your chickens, my dear. You haven't seen the last of that Dragon yet."

Now the next day was Saturday. And in the afternoon the Dragon suddenly swooped down upon the common in all his hideous redness, and carried off the football players, umpires, goal-posts, football, and all.

Then the people were very angry indeed, and they said —

"We might as well be a Republic. After saving up all these years to get his crown, and everything!"

And wise people shook their heads and foretold a decline in the National Love of Sport. And, indeed, football was not at all popular for some time afterwards.

Lionel did his best to be a good King during the week, and the people were beginning to forgive him for letting the Dragon out of the book. "After all," they said, "football is a dangerous game, and perhaps it is wise to discourage it."

Popular opinion held that the football players, being tough and hard, had disagreed with the Dragon so much that he had gone away to some place where they only play cats' cradle and games that do not make you hard and tough.

All the same, Parliament met on the Saturday afternoon, a convenient time, when most of the members would be free to attend, to consider the Dragon. But unfortunately the Dragon, who had only been asleep, woke up because it was Saturday, and he considered the Parliament, and afterwards there were not any members left, so they tried to make a new Parliament, but being a member had somehow grown as unpopular as football playing, and no one would consent to be elected, so they had to do without a Parliament. When the next Saturday came round everyone was a little nervous, but the Red Dragon was pretty quiet that day and only ate an Orphanage.

Lionel was very, very unhappy. He felt that it was his disobedience that had brought this trouble on the Parliament and the Orphanage and the football players, and he felt that it was his duty to try and do something. The question was, what?

The Blue Bird that had come out of the book used to sing very nicely in the Palace rose-garden, and the Butterfly was very tame, and would perch on his shoulder when he walked among the tall lilies: so Lionel saw that *all* the creatures in the Book of Beasts could not be wicked, like the Dragon, and he thought —

"Suppose I could get another beast out who would fight the Dragon?"

So he took the Book of Beasts out into the rose-garden and opened the page next

"THE DRAGON ONLY ATE AN ORPHANAGE."

to the one where the Dragon had been, just a tiny bit to see what the name was. He could only see "cora," but he felt the middle of the page swelling up thick with the creature that was trying to come out, and it was only by putting the book down and sitting on it suddenly, very hard, that he managed to get it shut. Then he fastened the clasps with the rubies and turquoises in them and sent for the Chancellor, who had been ill on Saturday week, and so not been eaten with the rest of the Parliament, and he said:—

"What animal ends in 'cora'?"

The Chancellor answered —

"The Manticora, of course."

"What is he like?" asked the King.

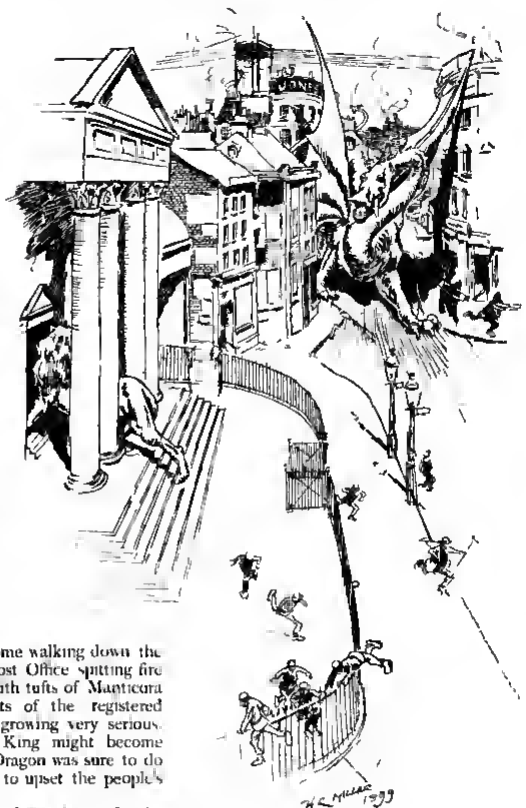
"He is the sworn foe of Dragons," said the Chancellor. "He drinks their blood. He is yellow, with the body of a lion and the face of a man. I wish we had a few Manticoras here now. But the last died hundreds of years ago—worse luck!"

Then the King ran and opened the book at the page that had "cora" on it, and there was the picture—Manticora, all yellow, with a lion's body and a man's face, just as the Chancellor had said. And under the picture was written, "The Manticora."

And in a few minutes the Manticora came sleepily out of the book, rubbing its eyes with its hands and mewing piteously. It seemed very stupid, and when Lionel gave it a push and said, "Go along and fight the Dragon, do," it put its tail between its legs and fairly ran away. It went and hid behind the Town Hall, and at night when the people were asleep it went round and ate all the pussy-cats in the town. And then it mewed more than ever. And on the Saturday morning, when people were a little timid about going out, because the Dragon had no regular hour for calling, the Manticora went up and down the streets and drank all the milk that was left in the cans at the doors for people's teas, and it ate the cans as well.

And just when it had finished the very last little ha'porth, which was short measure,

because the milk man's nerves were quite upset, the Red Dragon came down the street looking for the Manticora. It edged off when it saw him coming, for it was not at all the Dragon-fighting kind, and, seeing no other door open, the poor, hunted creature took refuge in the General Post Office, and there the Dragon found it, trying to conceal itself among the ten o'clock mail. The Dragon fell on the Manticora at once, and the mail was no defence. The mewings were heard all over the town. All the pussies and the milk the Manticora had had seemed to have strengthened its mew wonderfully. Then there was a sad silence, and presently the people whose windows looked that way saw the Dragon come walking down the steps of the General Post Office spitting fire and smoke, together with tufts of Manticora fur, and the fragments of the registered letters. Things were growing very serious. However popular the King might become during the week, the Dragon was sure to do something on Saturday to upset the people's loyalty.



"THE MANTICORA TOOK REFUGE IN THE GENERAL POST OFFICE."

The Dragon was a perfect nuisance for the whole of Saturday, except during the hour of noon, and then he had to rest under a tree or he would have caught fire from the heat of the sun. You see, he was very hot to begin with.

At last came a Saturday when the Dragon actually walked into the Royal nursery and carried off the King's own pet Rocking-Horse. Then the King cried for six days, and on the seventh he was so tired that he had to stop. Then he heard the Blue Bird singing among the roses and saw the Butterfly fluttering among the lilies, and he said:

"Nurse, wipe my face, please. I am not going to cry any more."

Nurse washed his face, and told him not to be a silly little King. "Crying," said she, "never did anyone any good yet."

"I don't know," said the little King, "I seem to see better, and to hear better now that I've cried for a week. Now, Nurse, dear, I know I'm right, so kiss me in case I never come back. I *must* try if I can't save the people."

"Well, if you must, you must," said Nurse; "but don't tear your clothes or get your feet wet"

So off he went

The Blue Bird sang more sweetly than ever, and the Butterfly shone more brightly as Lionel once more carried the Book of Beasts out into the rose-garden, and opened it—very quickly—so that he might not be afraid and change his mind The book fell open wide, almost in the middle, and there was written at the bottom of the page, "The Hippogriff," and before Lionel had time to see what the picture was, there was a fluttering of great wings and a stamping of hoofs, and a sweet, soft, friendly neighing; and there came out of the book a beautiful white horse with a long, long, long mane and a long, long white tail, and he had great wings like swan's wings, and the softest, kindest eyes in the world, and he stood there among the roses.

The Hippogriff rubbed its silky-soft, milky-white nose against the little King's shoulder, and the little King thought "But for the wings you are very like my poor, dear, lost Rocking-Horse" And the Blue Bird sang very loud and sweet.

Then suddenly the King saw coming through the sky the great straggling, sprawling, wicked shape of the Red Dragon And he knew at once what he must do He caught up the Book of Beasts and jumped on the back of the gentle, beautiful Hippogriff, and leaning down he whispered in the sharp white ears—

"Fly, dear Hippogriff, fly your very fastest to the Pebbly Waste."

And when the Dragon saw them start, he turned and flew after them, with his great wings flaming like clouds at sunset, and the Hippogriff spread his wide wings, and they were snowy as clouds at the moon rising.

When the people in the town saw the Dragon fly off after the Hippogriff and the King they all came out of their houses to look, and when they saw the two disappear they made up their minds to the worst, and began to think what would be worn for Court mourning.

But the Dragon could not catch the Hippogriff The red wings were bigger than the white ones, but they were not so strong, and so the white-winged horse flew away and away and away, with the Dragon pursuing, till he reached the very middle of the Pebbly Waste.

Now, the Pebbly Waste is just like the parts of the seaside where there is no sand—all round, loose, shifting stones, and there is no grass there and no tree within a hundred miles of it

Lionel jumped off the white horse's back in the very middle of the Pebbly Waste, and he hurriedly unclasped the Book of Beasts and laid it open on the pebbles. Then he clattered among the pebbles in his haste to get back on to his white horse, and had just jumped on when up came the Dragon He was flying very feebly, and looking round everywhere for a tree, for it was just on the stroke of twelve, the sun was shining like a gold guinea in the blue sky, and there was not a tree for a hundred miles

The white-winged horse flew round and round the Dragon as he writhed on the dry pebbles. He was getting very hot indeed, parts of him even had begun to smoke He knew that he must certainly catch fire in another minute unless he could get under a tree. He made a snatch with his red claws at the King and Hippogriff, but he was too feeble to reach them, and besides, he did not dare to over-exert himself for fear he should get any hotter

It was then that he saw the Book of Beasts lying on the pebbles, open at the page with "The Dragon" written at the bottom He looked and he hesitated, and he looked again, and then, with one last squirm of rage, the Dragon wrigged himself back into the picture, and sat down under the palm tree, and the page was a little singed as he went in

As soon as Lionel saw that the Dragon had really been obliged to go and sit under his own palm tree because it was the only tree there, he jumped off his horse and shut the book with a bang

"Oh, hurrah!" he cried "Now we really *have* done it"

And he clasped the book very tight with the turquoise and ruby clasps

"Oh, my precious Hippogriff," he cried, "you are the bravest, dearest, most beautiful—"

"Hush," whispered the Hippogriff, modestly "Don't you see that we are not alone?"

And indeed there was quite a crowd round them on the Pebbly Waste—the Prime Minister and the Parliament and the Football Players and the Orphanage and the Manticora and the Rocking Horse, and indeed everyone who had been eaten by the Dragon You see, it was impossible for the Dragon to take them into the book with him—it was a tight fit even for

"HE SHUT THE BOOK WITH A BANG."

one Dragon—so, of course, he had to leave them outside!

They all got home somehow, and all lived happy ever after.

When the King asked the Manticora where he would like to live he begged to be allowed to go back into the book. "I do not care for public life," he said.

Of course he knew his way on to his own page, so there was no danger of his opening the book at the wrong page and letting out a Dragon or anything. So he got back into his picture, and has never come out since: that is why you will never see a Manticora as long as you live, except in a picture-book. And of course he left the pussies outside, because there was no room for them in the book—and the milk-cans too.

Then the Rocking Horse begged to be allowed to go and live on the Hippogriff's page of the book. "I should like," he said, "to live somewhere where Dragons can't get at me."

So the beautiful, white-winged Hippogriff showed him the way in, and there he stayed till the King had him taken out for his great great-great great-grandchildren to play with.

As for the Hippogriff, he accepted the position of the King's Own Rocking-Horse—a situation left vacant by the retirement of the wooden one. And the Blue Bird and the Butterfly sing and flutter among the lilies and roses of the Palace garden to this very day.

By E Nesbit.

THE Princess and the gardener's boy were playing in the back yard.

"What will you do when you grow up, Princess?" asked the gardener's boy.

"I should like to marry you, Tom," said the Princess. "Would you mind?"

"No," said the gardener's boy. "I shouldn't mind much. I'll marry you if you like—if I have time."

For the gardener's boy meant, as soon as he was grown-up, to be a general and a poet and a Prime Minister and an admiral and a civil engineer. Meanwhile he was top of all his classes at school, and tip-top of the geography class.

As for the Princess Mary Ann, she was a very good little girl, and everyone loved her. She was always kind and polite, even to her Uncle James and to other people whom she did not like very much; and though she was not very clever, for a Princess, she always tried to do her lessons. Even if you know perfectly well that you can't do your lessons, you may as well try, and sometimes you find that by some fortunate accident they really *are* done. Then the Princess had a truly good heart: she was always kind to her pets. She never slapped her hippopotamus when it broke her dolls in its playful gambols, and she never forgot to feed her rhinoceroses in their little hutch in the back yard. Her elephant was devoted to her, and sometimes Mary Ann made her nurse quite cross by smuggling the dear little thing up to bed with her and letting it go to sleep with its long trunk laid lovingly across her throat, and its pretty head cuddled under the Royal right ear.

When the Princess had been good all through the week—for, like all real, live, nice children, she was sometimes naughty, but never bad—nurse would allow her to ask her little friends to come on Wednesday morning early and spend the day, because Wednesday is the end of the week in that country. Then, in the afternoon, when all the little dukes and duchesses and marquises and countesses had finished their rice-pudding, and had had their hands and faces washed after it, nurse would say—

"Now, my dears, what would you like to do this afternoon?" just as if she didn't

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know! And the answer would be always the same —

"Oh, do let's go to the Zoological Gardens and ride on the big guinea pig and feed the rabbits and hear the dormouse asleep."

So their pinafores were taken off and they all went to the Zoological Gardens—where twenty of them could ride at a time on the guinea-pig, and where even the little ones could feed the great rabbits if some grown up person were kind enough to lift them up for the purpose. And there always was some such person, because in Rotundia everybody was kind—except one.

"THEY ALL WENT TO THE ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS"

Now that you have read as far as this you know, of course, that the Kingdom of Rotundia was a very remarkable place; and if you are a thoughtful child—as of course you are—you will not need me to tell you what was the most remarkable thing about it. But in case you are not a thoughtful child—and it is just possible of course that you are *not*—I will tell you at once what that most remarkable thing was. *All the animals were the wrong sizes!* And this was how it happened.

In old, old, olden times, when all our world was just loose earth and air and fire and water mixed up anyhow like a pudding, and spinning round like mad trying to get the different things to settle into their proper places, a round piece of earth got loose and went spinning away by itself across the water which was just beginning to try to get spread out smooth into a real sea. And as the great round piece of earth flew away, going round and round as hard as it could, it met a long piece of hard rock that had got loose from another part of the puddingy mixture, and the rock was so hard, and was going so fast, that it ran its point through the island and stuck out on the other side of it, so that the two together were like a very-very-much-too-big teetotum.

I am afraid all this is very dull, but you know geography is never quite lively, and after all I must give you a little information even in a fairy tale—like the powder in jam.

Well, when the pointed rock smashed into the round bit of earth the shock was so great that it set them spinning together through the air—which was just getting into its proper place, like all the rest of the things—only, as luck would have it, they forgot which way round they had been going, and began to spin round the wrong way. Presently Centre of Gravity—a great giant who was managing the whole business—woke up in the middle of the earth and began to grumble.

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"Hurry up," he said, "come down and be still, can't you?"

So the rock with the round piece of earth fell into the sea, and the point of the rock went into a hole that just fitted it in the stony sea-bottom, and there it spun round the wrong way seven times and then lay still. And that round piece of land became, after millions of years, the Kingdom of Rotundia.

This is the end of the geography lesson. And now for just a little natural history, so that we may not feel that we are quite wasting our time. Of course, the consequence of the island having spun round the wrong way was that when the animals began to grow on the island they all grew the wrong sizes. The guinea pig, as you know, was as big as our elephants, and the elephant—dear little pet—was the size of the silly, tiny, black-and-tan dogs that ladies carry sometimes in their muffs. The rabbits were about the size of our rhinoceroses, and all about the wild parts of the island they had made their burrows as big as railway tunnels. The dormouse, of course, was the biggest of all the creatures. I can't tell you how big he was. Even if you think of elephants it will not help you at all. Luckily there was only one of him, and he was always asleep. Otherwise I don't think the Rotundians could have borne with him. As it was, they made him a house, and it saved the expense of a brass band, because no band could possibly have been heard when the dormouse was talking in his sleep.

The men and women and children in this wonderful island were quite the right size, because their ancestors had come over with the Conqueror long after the island had settled down and the animals grown on it.

Now the natural history lesson is over, and if you have been attending, you know more about Rotundia than anyone there did, except three people: the Lord Chief Schoolmaster, and the Princess's uncle—who was a magician, and knew everything without learning it—and Tom, the gardener's son.

Tom had learned more at school than anyone else, because he wished to take a prize. The prize offered by the Lord Chief Schoolmaster was a "History of Rotundia"—beautifully bound, with the Royal arms on the back. But after that day when the Princess said she meant to marry Tom, the gardener's boy thought it over, and he decided that the best prize in the world would be the Princess, and this was the prize Tom meant to take, and when you are a gardener's son, and have decided to marry a Princess, you will find that the more you learn at school the better.

The Princess always played with Tom on the days when the little dukes and marquises did not come to tea—and when he told her he was almost sure of the first prize, she clapped her hands and said—

"Dear Tom, dear good, clever Tom, you deserve all the prizes. And I will give you my pet elephant—and you can keep him till we're married."

The pet elephant was called Fido, and the gardener's son took him away in his coat-pocket. He was the dearest little elephant you ever saw—about six inches long. But he was very, very wise—he could not have been wiser if he had been a mile high. He lay down comfortably in Tom's pocket, and when Tom put in his hand, Fido curled his little trunk round Tom's fingers with an affectionate confidence that made the boy's heart warm to his new little pet. What with the elephant, and the Princess's affection, and the knowledge that the very next day he would receive the "History of Rotundia," beautifully bound, with the Royal arms on the cover, Tom could hardly sleep a wink. And, besides, the dog did bark so terribly. There was only one dog in Rotundia—the kingdom could not afford to keep more than one—he was a Mexican lap-dog of the kind that in most parts of the world only measures seven inches from the end of his dear nose to the tip of his darling tail—but in Rotundia he was bigger than I can possibly expect you to believe. And when he barked, his bark was so large that it filled up all the night and left no room for sleep or dreams or polite conversation, or anything else at all. He never barked at things that went on in the island—he was too large-minded for that, but when ships went blundering by in the dark, tumbling over the rocks at the end of the island, he would bark once or twice, just to let the ships know that they couldn't come playing about there just as they liked.

But on this particular night he barked, and barked, and barked—and the Princess said, "Oh dear, oh dear, I wish he wouldn't, I am so sleepy." And Tom said to himself "I wonder whatever is the matter. As soon as it's light I'll go and see."

So when it began to be pretty pink-and-yellow daylight, Tom got up and went out. And all the time the Mexican lap-dog barked so that the houses shook, and the tiles on

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the roof of the palace rattled like milk-cans in a cart whose horse is frisky.

"I'll go to the pillar," thought Tom, as he went through the town. The pillar, of course, was the top of the piece of rock that had stuck itself through Rotundia millions of years before, and made it spin round the wrong way. It was quite in the middle of the island, and stuck up ever so far, and when you were at the top you could see a great deal farther than when you were not.

As Tom went out from the town, and across the downs, he thought what a pretty sight it was to see the rabbits in the bright, dewy morning, frisking with their young ones by the mouths of their burrows. He did not go very near the rabbits, of course, because when a rabbit of that size is at play it does not always look where it is going, and it might easily have crushed Tom with its foot, and then it would have been very sorry afterwards. And Tom was a kind boy, and would not have liked to make even a rabbit unhappy. Earwigs in our country often get out of the way when they think you are going to walk on them. They too have kind hearts, and they would not like you to be sorry afterwards.

So Tom went on, looking at the rabbits and watching the morning grow more and more red and golden. And the Mexican lap-dog barked all the time, till the church bells tinkled, and the chimney of the apple factory rocked again.

But when Tom got to the pillar, he saw that he would not need to climb to the top to find out what the dog was barking at.

BY THE PILLAR LAY A VERY LARGE PURPLE DRAGON

For there, by the pillar, lay a very large purple dragon. His wings were like old purple umbrellas that have been very much rained on, and his head was large and bald, like the top of a purple toad-stool, and his tail, which was purple too, was very, very, very long, and thin, and tight like the lash of a carriage whip.

It was licking one of its purple umbrella-y wings, and every now and then it moaned and leaned its head back against the rocky pillar as though it felt faint. Tom saw at once what had happened. A flight of purple dragons must have crossed the island in the night, and this poor one must have knocked its wing and broken it against the pillar.

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Everyone is kind to everyone in Rotundia, and Tom was not afraid of the dragon, although he had never spoken to one before He had often watched them flying across the sea, but he had never expected to get to know one personally.

So now he said:—

"I am afraid you don't feel quite well"

The dragon shook his large purple head He could not speak, but like all other animals, he could understand well enough when he liked.

"Can I get you anything?" asked Tom, politely.

The dragon opened his purple eyes with an inquiring smile.

"A bun or two, now," said Tom, coaxingly; "there's a beautiful bun tree quite close"

The dragon opened a great purple mouth and licked his purple lips, so Tom ran and shook the bun tree, and soon came back with an armful of fresh currant buns, and as he came he picked a few of the Bath kind which grow on the low bushes near the pillar.

Because, of course, another consequence of the island's having spun the wrong way is that all the things we have to make—buns and cakes and shortbread—grow on trees and bushes, but in Rotundia they have to make their cauliflowers and cabbages and carrots and apples and onions, just as our cooks make puddings and turnovers.

Tom gave all the buns to the dragon, saying:—

"Here, try to eat a little. You'll soon feel better then."

The dragon ate up the buns, nodded rather ungraciously, and began to lick his wing again. So Tom left him, and went back to the town with the news, and everyone was so excited at a real live dragon's being on the island—a thing which had never happened before—that they all went out to look at it, instead of going to the prize-giving, and the Lord Chief Schoolmaster went with the rest. Now, he had Tom's prize, the "History of Rotundia," in his pocket—the one bound in calf, with the Royal arms on the cover—and it happened to drop out, and the dragon ate it, so Tom never got the prize after all. But the dragon, when he had got it, did not like it.

"Perhaps it's all for the best," said Tom. "I might not have liked that prize either, if I had got it."

It happened to be a Wednesday, so when the Princess's friends were asked what they would like to do, all the little dukes and marquises and earls said, "Let's go and see the dragon" But the little duchesses and marchionesses and countesses said they were afraid.

Then Princess Mary Ann spoke up royally, and said, "Don't be silly, because it's only in fairy stories and histories of England, and things like that, that people are unkind and want to hurt each other. In Rotundia everyone is kind, and no one has anything to be afraid of, unless they're naughty, and then we know it's for our own good. Let's all go and see the dragon We might take him some acid-drops."

So they went. And all the titled children took it in turns to feed the dragon with acid-drops, and he seemed pleased and flattered,

"THE TITLED CHILDREN TOOK IT IN TURNS TO FEED THE DRAGON

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and wagged as much of his purple tail as he could get at conveniently; for it was a very, very long tail indeed. But when it came to the Princess's turn to give an acid-drop to the dragon, he smiled a very wide smile, and wagged his tail to the very last long inch of it, as much as to say, "Oh, you nice, kind, pretty little Princess." But deep down in his wicked purple heart he was saying, "Oh, you nice, *fat*, pretty little Princess, I should like to eat you instead of these silly acid-drops" But, of course, nobody heard him except the Princess's uncle, and he was a magician, and accustomed to listening at doors It was part of his trade

Now, you will remember that I told you there was *one* wicked person in Rotundia, and I cannot conceal from you any longer that this Complete Bad was the Princess's Uncle James. Now, magicians are always bad, as you know from your fairy books, and some uncles are bad, as you see by the "Babes in the Wood," or the "Norfolk Tragedy," and one James at least was bad, as you have learned from your English history. And when anyone is a magician, and is also an uncle, and is named James as well, you need not expect anything nice from him He is a Three Fold Complete Bad—and he will come to no good

Uncle James had long wanted to get rid of the Princess, and have the kingdom to himself He did not like many things—a nice kingdom was almost the only thing he cared for—but he had never seen his way quite clearly, because everyone is so kind in Rotundia that wicked spells will not work there, but run off those blameless islanders like water off a duck's back Now, however, Uncle James thought there might be a chance for him—because he knew that now there were two wicked people on the island who could stand by each other—himself and the dragon But he said nothing, only he exchanged a meaning glance with the dragon, and everyone went home to tea And no one had seen the meaning glance, except Tom. And he went home, and told his elephant all about it The intelligent little creature listened carefully, and then climbed from Tom's knee to the table, on which stood an ornamental calendar which the Princess had given Tom for a Christmas present. With its tiny trunk the elephant pointed out a date—the 15th of August—the Princess's birthday, and looked anxiously at its master.

"What is it, Fido—good little elephant—then?" said Tom, and the sagacious animal repeated its former gesture. Then Tom understood.

"Oh, something is to happen on her birthday? All right. I'll be on the look-out," and he was

"BY AND BY HE BEGAN TO WANDER.

At first the people of Rotundia were quite pleased with the dragon—who lived by the pillar and fed himself from the bun-trees, but by and-by he began to wander. He would creep into the burrows made by the great rabbits, and excursionists, sporting on the downs, would see his long, tight, whip-like tail wriggling down a burrow and out of sight, and before they had time to say, "There he goes," his ugly purple head would

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come poking out from another rabbit-hole—perhaps just behind them—or laugh softly to itself just in their ears. And the dragon's laugh was not a merry one. This sort of hide-and-seek amused people at first, but by-and-by it began to get on their nerves; and if you don't know what that means, ask mother to tell you next time you are playing hide-and-seek when she has a headache. Then the dragon got into the habit of cracking his tail, as people crack whips, and this also got on people's nerves. Then, too, little things began to be missed. And you know how unpleasant that is, even in a private school, and in a public kingdom it is, of course, much worse. The things that were missed were nothing much at first—a few little elephants, a hippopotamus or two, and some giraffes, and things like that. It was nothing much, as I say—but it made people feel uncomfortable. Then one day a favourite rabbit of the Princess's called Frederick mysteriously disappeared, and then came a terrible morning when the Mexican lap-dog was missing. He had barked ever since the dragon came to the island, and people had grown quite used to the noise. So when his barking suddenly ceased it woke everybody up—and they all went out to see what was the matter. And the lap-dog was gone!

A boy was sent to wake the army, so that it might look for him. But the army was gone too! And now the people began to be frightened. Then Uncle James came out on to the terrace of the palace, and he made the people a speech. He said—

"Friends—fellow-citizens—I cannot disguise from myself or from you that this purple dragon is a poor penniless exile—a helpless alien in our midst, and, besides, he is a—is no end of a dragon."

The people thought of the dragon's tail and said, "Hear, hear."

Uncle James went on. "Something has happened to a gentle and defenceless member of our community. We don't know what has happened."

Everyone thought of the rabbit named Frederick and groaned.

"The defences of our country have been swallowed up," said Uncle James.

Everyone thought of the poor army.

"There is only one thing to be done." Uncle James was warming to his subject. "Could we ever forgive ourselves if by neglecting a simple precaution we lost more rabbits—or even, perhaps, our navy, our police, and our fire brigade? I or I warn you that the purple dragon will respect nothing, however sacred."

Everyone thought of themselves—and they said, "What is the simple precaution?"

Then Uncle James said—

"To-morrow is the dragon's birthday. He is accustomed to have a present on his birthday. If he gets a nice present he will be in a hurry to take it away and show it to his friends, and he will fly off and never come back."

The crowd cheered wildly—and the Princess from her balcony clapped her hands.

"The present the dragon expects," said Uncle James, cheerfully, "is rather an expensive one. But, when we give, it should not be in a grudging spirit, especially to visitors. What the dragon wants is a Princess. We have only one Princess, it is true, but far be it from us to display a miserly temper at such a moment. And the gift is worthless that costs the giver nothing. Your readiness to give up your Princess will only show how generous you are."

The crowd began to cry, for they loved their Princess, though they quite saw that their first duty was to be generous and give the poor dragon what it wanted.

The Princess began to cry, for she did not want to be anybody's birthday present—especially a purple dragon's. And Tom began to cry because he was so angry.

He went straight home and told his little elephant—and the elephant cheered him up so much that presently the two grew quite absorbed in a tee-to-tum which the elephant was spinning with his little trunk.

Early in the morning Tom went to the palace. He looked out across the downs—there were hardly any rabbits playing there now—and then he gathered white roses and threw them at the Princess's window till she woke up and looked out.

"Come up and kiss me," she said.

So Tom climbed up the white rose bush and kissed the Princess through the window, and said—

"Many happy returns of the day!"

Then Mary Ann began to cry, and said—

"Oh, Tom—how can you? When you know quite well——"

"Oh, don't," said Tom. "Why, Mary Ann, my precious, my Princess—what do you think I should be doing while the dragon was getting his birthday present? Don't cry, my own little Mary Ann! Fido and I have arranged everything. You've only got to do as you are told."

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"Is that all?" said the Princess. "Oh—that's easy—I've often done *that!*"

Then Tom told her what she was to do. And she kissed him again and again. "Oh, you dear, good, clever Tom," she said; "how glad I am that I gave you Fido. You two have saved me. You dears!"

The next morning Uncle James put on his best coat and hat and the waistcoat with the gold snakes on it—he was a magician, and he had a bright taste in waistcoats—and he called with a cab to take the Princess out.

"Come, little birthday present," he said, tenderly, "the dragon *will* be so pleased. And I'm glad to see you're not crying. You know, my child, we cannot begin too young to learn to think of the happiness of others rather than our own. I should not like my dear little niece to be selfish, or to wish to deny a trivial pleasure to a poor, sick dragon, far from his home and friends."

And the Princess said she would try not to be selfish.

So presently the cab drew up near the pillar—and there was the dragon, his ugly purple head shining in the sun, and his ugly purple mouth half open.

"THE DRAGON AFTER HER."

Then Uncle James said, "Good morning, sir. We have brought you a small present for your birthday. We do not like to let such an anniversary go by without some suitable testimonial, especially to one who is a stranger in our midst. Our means are small, but our hearts are large. We have but one Princess, but we give her freely—do we not, my child?"

The Princess said she supposed so, and the dragon came a little nearer.

Suddenly a voice cried: "Run!" and there was Tom, and he had brought the Zoological guinea-pig and a pair of Belgian hares with him.

"Just to see fair," said Tom.

Uncle James was furious. "What do you mean, sir," he cried, "by intruding on a State function with your common rabbits and things? Go away, naughty little boy, and play with them somewhere else."

But while he was speaking the rabbits had come up one on each side of him, their great sides towering ever so high, and now they pressed him between them so that he was buried in their thick fur and almost choked. The Princess, meantime, had run to the other side of the pillar and was peeping round it to see what was going on. A crowd had followed the cab out of the town; now they reached the scene of the "State function"—and they all cried out:—

"Fair play! play fair. We can't go back on our word like this. Give a thing and take a thing? Why, it's *never* done. Let the poor exiled stranger dragon have his birthday present." And they tried to get at Tom—but the guinea-pig stood in the way.

"Yes," Tom cried. "Fair play *is* a jewel. And your helpless exile shall have the Princess if he can catch her. Now then, Mary Ann."

Mary Ann looked round the big pillar and called to the dragon. "Bo! you can't catch me," and began to run as fast as ever she could, and the dragon after her. When the Princess had run half a mile she stopped, dodged round a tree, and ran back to the pillar and round it, and the dragon after her. You see, he was so long he could not turn as quickly as she

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could. Round and round the pillar ran the Princess. The first time she ran round a long way from the pillar, and then nearer and nearer—with the dragon after her all the time; and he was so busy trying to catch her that he never noticed that Tom had tied the very end of his long, tight, whip-cordy tail to the rock, so that the more the dragon ran round, the more times he twisted his tail round the pillar. It was exactly like winding a top—only the peg was the pillar, and the dragon's tail was the string. And the magician was safe between the Belgian hares, and couldn't see anything but darkness or do anything but choke.

When the dragon was wound on to the pillar, as much as he could possibly be, and as tight—like cotton on a reel—the Princess stopped running, and though she had very little breath left, she managed to say, "Yah—who's won now?"

This annoyed the dragon so much that he put out all his strength—spread his great purple wings, and tried to fly at her. Of course this pulled his tail, and pulled it very hard, so hard that as he pulled the tail *had* to come, and the pillar *had* to come round with the tail, and the island had to come round with the pillar, and in another minute the tail was loose, and the island was spinning round exactly like a tee-to tum. It spun so fast that everyone fell flat on their faces and held on tight to themselves, because they felt something was going to happen. All but the magician, who was choking between the Belgian hares, and felt nothing but fur and fury.

And something did happen. The dragon had sent the kingdom of Rotundia spinning the way it ought to have gone at the beginning of the world, and as it spun round all the animals began to change sizes. The guinea-pigs got small and the elephants got big, and the men and women and children would have changed sizes, too, if they had not had the sense to hold on to themselves, very tight indeed, with both hands; which, of course, the animals could not be expected to know how to do. And the best of it was that when the small beasts got big and the big beasts got small the dragon got small too, and fell at the Princess's feet—a little, crawling, purple newt with wings.

"Funny little thing," said the Princess, when she saw it. "I will take it for a birthday present."

But while all the people were still on their faces, holding on tight to themselves, Uncle James, the magician, never thought of holding tight—he only thought of how to punish Belgian hares and the sons of gardeners; so when the big beasts grew small, he grew small with the other beasts, and the little purple dragon, when he fell at the Princess's feet, saw there a very small magician named Uncle James. And the dragon took him because it wanted a birthday present.

So now all the animals were new sizes and at first it seemed very strange to every one to have great lumbering elephants and a tiny little dormouse, but they have got used to it now, and think no more of it than we do.

All this happened several years ago, and the other day I saw in the *Rotundia Times* an account of the wedding of the Princess with Lord Thomas Gardener, K.C.D., and I knew she could not have married anyone but Tom, so I suppose they made him a Lord on purpose for the wedding—and K.C.D., of course, means Clever Conqueror of the Dragon. If you think that is wrong it is only because you don't know how they spell in Rotundia. The peper said that among the beautiful presents of the bridegroom to the bride was an enormous elephant, on which the bridal pair made their wedding tour. This must have been Fido. You remember Tom promised to give him back to the Princess when they were married. The *Rotundia Times* called the married couple "the happy pair." It was clever of the paper to think of calling them that—it is such a pretty and novel expression—and I think it is truer than many of the things you see in pepers.

Because, you see, the Princess and the gardener's son were so fond of each other they could not help being happy—and besides, they had an elephant of their very own to ride on. If that is not enough to make people happy, I should like to know what is. Though, of course, I know there are some people who could not be happy unless they had a whale to sail on, and perhaps not even then. But they are greedy, grasping people, the kind who would take four helps of pudding, as likely as not, which neither Tom nor Mary Ann ever did.

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THE GOLDEN TIGER

BY

F. NORREYS CONNELL.

IT is not long since the Rajah of Rhatameh took courage of his passion and murdered Mr Tinspire, the British Resident, sending his head in a biscuit-box to his wife, yet the occurrence is hardly remembered. I, John Quirke, captain in the Bengal Staff Corps, have not forgotten—cannot forget it. And this is why

I was in command of the Sepoy company forming Mr. Tinspire's escort when we fell into the trap which Rhatameh had laid. I was cut down, and thought to have been destroyed then and there, but instead was carried not ungently to the Rajah's palace, which was rather fort than mansion. He invited me to drink tea with him, and this I did, half expecting to find it poisoned, but unwilling to let him think that I cared overmuch. No symptom of irritation followed on the first cup, so I drank a second, and Rhatameh and I chatted pleasantly away, for the most part about polo, at which he was an expert and I wished to be.

He made me forget I was his prisoner, not unlikely under sentence of death, as he described to me with all a sportsman's eye to detail how best to hold up a pony's head when making a cross-drive. From ponies we came to horses, and sending for his Wazir battle-steed he called me to admire his points, a thing I had no difficulty in doing, for they were patent. After this he showed me his sporting armoury, containing every species of weapon, from a saloon pistol to an elephant gun. Comparatively ignorant about cattle, here I felt myself quite at home, and soon picked out the choicest items of his collection. With a Mannlicher repeater between us, we discussed grips and balances, cams and tumbling blocks.

"You have shot tigers?" he queried.

"Five," said I.

"Thirty have fallen to my gun," he boasted, and in my heart I said he was a liar, for there were few great beasts in that country, and the rulers of Rhatameh only went abroad to make war. There was an explanation. "That sport costs too much money; every tiger I kill has to be sent up from Bengal. The dealers ask me 2,000 rupees each, and will do nothing until they are paid . . . I despise the Bengalese—they are all tradesmen. They dare not face the king of the jungle: they entrap him and send him to me to be slain—and then they ask me for money, from me who did them this service. I say I despise them: they are afraid of the English. I am not afraid of the English. I have beaten the English at polo and in battle. You, an English officer, are my prisoner. I could spit in your face and you dare not hinder me. . . . But you, with your strange European mind, would say I was no gentleman, and to that I cannot listen. Therefore, I shall be gracious towards you."

I nearly grinned at the Rajah during this speech, for, hopeless as then would be my chance of ultimate escape, I knew my hand was heavy enough to shatter His Highness's skull if he attempted bodily insult.

Ignoring the side issue, I asked if he had shot lately. "Not tigers," he told me, with a suspicion of malice in his tone

"You have no tigers now?"

He stared me abruptly in the face "Yes, one: the Sacred Tiger. Have you not heard of him?"

I cudgelled my brains. "The Golden Tiger of Khandara. Is that the beast?"

"Kohilu, the Sacred Tiger of Khandara, is of ruddy gold," quoth the Rajah

"Is it a tiger really, your Highness?"

"Think you it to be a mule?" he retorted. "Would you see for yourself?"

"If your Highness would bring me," I replied, and his crafty smile showed that he took my meaning

"I will bring you," he acquiesced. "Kohilu will not harm his master, but I cannot promise you your safety."

"That I will answer for, if your Highness will permit."

He held up his hand warningly. "You may take no weapon. Whatever shall come to pass, the Sacred Tiger of Khandara must not be injured."

This was a stumbling-block for me, but although he looked me through and through I did not let him see it.

"I quite understand, your Royal Highness," I made answer, very quietly. "Sacred vessels are easy to crack, hard to replace."

"Silence!" ordered the Rajah, imperiously. "Keep your irony until you are facing Kohilu. Then say what you will unless, indeed, something we cannot foresee should stop you."

Catching up his humour, I replied, "Killing or being killed is my business. If I cannot do the one, I am not unprepared to submit to the other."

"Wait," said the Rajah, again. "It is easy to talk."

I bowed and declared myself at his disposal.

The Rajah took from his armoury a large gold instrument, not unlike an elephant goad fitted with a huge corkscrew handle.

"MY MAGIC WAND."

He answered my questioning glance with the words, "My magic wand," and looked so unutterably conceited, that I would have given half my chance of escape for the kicking of him

He was not a very powerful man, and, judging that his wand was heavier than the name implied, I offered to carry it for him; but he waved me back; nor did he trust it to a menial: we were to pay our visit to the Sacred Tiger absolutely without attendants of any kind. This did not astonish me, for it was natural that only few persons of the State should be allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, but it made me imagine that the object of our visit would be so chained up that he could not overpower us by his greeting

The temple of the sacred beast was outside the precincts of the palace, and, there being no steps, the entrance was approached by a long stone ramp of gentle incline. Up this I walked with a step so eager that I was begged to tarry by the Rajah.

That potentate, marking the few glances I cast around, called upon me to admire the view. "See Khandara and die," said he, whether he chose those words with special

intention I am not sure. As I said, we were without escort; looking back, it seems to me that had I here overpowered my companion I could have bid strongly for my liberty, but, oddly enough, my mind was so full of the new adventure that the idea of flight did not occur to me. At that moment I believe that I would have accepted the intervention of British troops quite as unwillingly as the Rajah himself. What I wanted was the tiger—that seen, there was leisure to think of my personal safety. The fact of the matter was that the Rajah had nettled my self-esteem, and I would have faced a family of cats, naked, in the arena rather than flinch before his eyes. The outer gate of the temple was opened by unseen hands as we approached, and swung to again when we had passed through. Great bars descending from the walls secured it on the inside. We were now in a paved courtyard, guarded by very high, embattled walls. Behind us was the gatehouse, which had no visible door or window, and in front was a large edifice built in a gaudy rococo style, which hurt my eyes so that I do not care to describe it.

"Does the poor beast never try to run away?" I asked, on the spur of the moment.

"No," answered the Rajah, thoughtfully. "He never does"—for once he did not take my meaning.

Arrived at the entrance to the temple proper, I noticed that it was closed by heavy swing doors without bolt, lock, or bar of any kind, but so constructed as to open only inwards.

The Rajah paused, and laying down his burden, produced a printed document and a stylographic pen.

"You are sure of yourself?" he asked.

"Sure," I affirmed.

"Then sign this," he returned, and handed me pen and paper.

I read: "This is to certify that I, " —here there was a blank for the name and other particulars—"enter the temple of Kohilu the Sacred Tiger of Khandara, of my own volition, at my own wish and under the protection of my own God. Signed day of 189 ."

"I will sign all but the last phrase," I declared. "I do not expect Providence to interest Himself in my foolhardiness."

The Rajah demurred. "All the others have signed," said he.

The words were dark, and it was with something of an effort that I modulated my reply. "The more reason, your Highness, for an exception."

"I do not make exceptions," said he.

"Then," I suggested, nonchalantly, "let us go back."

"Never," he rapped out, abruptly.

"Then," said I, in as nearly as possible the same tone as before, "let us go forward."

This irritated him to the serving of my purpose, and crumpling up the paper in his hand, he threw his weight against the doors and opened them wide enough for a man to pass.

"'ENTER,' HE CRIED, WITH THE VOICE OF A CHALLENGE."

"Enter," he cried, with the voice of a challenge.

"Thank you," I said. And with a final muster of my pride, in I strode, in my imagination buffeting death.

My nose received the first impression: there was no smell. Rather should I say

the penetrating effluvia of savage beasts was wanting or had been overcome by the odour of incense. The temple of the Sacred Tiger smelt like the sanctuary of a Catholic church rather than the cage of a wild animal. Yet a cage it undeniably was. Just clear of the doors swung fully back were the bars, iron, coated thickly with gold and of ancient design, but I suspect recent manufacture, for the gate which was open had very modern bolts and locks. The place was strewn with the litter of an ossuary. Lying in the middle was a long thin, white bone, unmistakably the *femur* of a woman, and not of a woman indigenous to the soil; but I saw no tiger or animal of any kind. A thought flashed upon me that the tiger of Khandara was Starvation, and that I had been lured here to die like a rat in a trap. I turned to make a frantic effort to battle my way out, and found the Rajah at my elbow quietly enjoying my trepidation.

"I thought," said he, slowly, "you wished to meet death."

"Visible, knowable death, willingly," said I.

"Death sleeps," answered the Rajah. "He is within."

Following the motion of his hand, I saw in the farther wall of the den another opening without a door, and leading apparently into darkness.

"I shall lead Kohilu forth," said the Rajah. And I was impressed by his dignity as he stepped into the cage and out at the farther opening as jauntily as I might enter my loose box.

Already marvelling when he passed into the pitchy darkness, I was really startled to see that darkness turn to light as if his presence were effulgent — although my commoo sense quickly suggested that many men have electric light in their stables. A fantastic shadow was thrown on the wall, as if a child in cap and frock were prodding a prediluvian monster with a corkscrew.

All the time I heard a grunting like the modified rumble of a donkey-engine. The sense of mystification changed from the ludicrous to the unbearable, and I was on the point of following the Rajah, when the noise ceased and the light simultaneously went out.

I drew a long breath. There was a chink of metal: the Rajah reappeared, leading by a gold chain, not the thickness of a watch-guard, a gigantic tiger, thirteen hands at the shoulder — the height of a polo-pony — and gorgeously marked.

"KOHILU!"

It took no notice of me, stalking round the cage at the end of its lead with the dull precision of a circus-horse. It struck me at once that it moved like no jungle creature I had ever seen, with its sharp angular steps and its tail dropped behind; but it was, none the less, formidable-looking, and my faith in the Rajah's intrepidity increased.

The tour of the arena twice made, the Rajah, following the beast, gently laid his hand on its withers, and the beast instantly stopped, falling into a statuesque attitude.

Said the Rajah, "Behold, Kohilu!"

I smiled in return and, approaching, made bold to stroke the beast. The Rajah motioned me back. "Remember, Kohilu my Familiar is Death." He appealed to the thing. "What art thou, oh, Heaven-sent one?"

"Tod," said a voice from Kohilu's inwards.

"Kohilu," explained the Rajah, rather

naïvely, "thinks you are a German." But the Rajah over-estimated my credulity. I preferred to draw my own conclusions, and began to suspect I could deal with both Monarch and "Familiar."

"Kohilu is a man-eater?" I asked.

"Kohilu eats nothing else."

"Yet his coat is not mangy."

"The covering of the immortals cannot decay."

"He has not fed this morning." I pointed to the dry bones underfoot.

"The day is yet young," returned the Rajah, oracularly.

There was a little pause, and passing his hand again over the animal's withers he caressed him.

"A quiet brute is Kohilu," I said at last.

"Think you so?" snorted the Rajah, his fingers fumbling under the long hair.

"I do," said I, and, choosing my spot, carefully dropped my hand on the brute's muzzle.

The great lower jaw opened and shut with a convulsive snap, but my fingers were well out of reach, and I did not remove my hand.

The Rajah changed colour, and the angry look came again in his eyes.

"Awake, Kohilu," he cried, and, loosing the animal, sprang backwards. The immense fore-paws flew up and caught me a blow in the chest that grounded me, and the beast leaped high in the air, its tail just clearing my head. Realizing my danger, I scrambled to my feet. The tiger was bounding round the place with huge upward leaps, more like the movement of a kangaroo than any other beast I knew of. It would rise 12ft. or 14ft. into the air; in falling, smite the ground viciously with its tail, and bound forward again.

All the while its claws worked incessantly, its eyes shone with fire, and its jaws snapped and snapped. In its flight it scattered the bones and litter in all directions, but it did not approach the Rajah very closely. Seeing this, I knew my chance was to keep at His Highness's back until these antics ceased. With what ease I could pretend to I lounged over to him and took my place as it were casually. The animal's bounds grew even higher, and the crash of its concussions with the earth became deafening. "Now is Kohilu a tiger or not?" shouted the Rajah.

"Your Highness knows best," I answered. "But this I will say—Kohilu came not from Bengal."

"Kohilu came from Heaven."

"Then," said I, firmly, "Heaven is in England."

"In England! Infidel dog!"

"If Kohilu came from Heaven, then Heaven is Sheffield."

"You lie! Kohilu never saw England."

"Nuremberg, then?"

"Kohilu's eyes have never beheld Europe!"

"Kohilu's eyes are electric lamps," I answered, and added, point-blank, "the fact is, your Highness, you are a child and Kohilu is your toy."

The words were yet on my lips when he sprang at me and flung me down right in the way the beast was coming, but I caught him to me and dragged him also down, determined I should not die alone. The beast fell short, and again leaped over us, the near hind claw tearing away the Rajah's turban as it took off.

Struggling, we rolled back to safer ground. The Rajah slipped out his poniard, but ere he could use it I snatched up that same long white bone which had caught my eye on entering the cage, and I knocked him senseless.

I had a mind to experience with his body the fate which he had intended to be mine, but what I can only call over-civilized sentimentality deterred me from doing so; and having removed his weapons, gagged and bound him, I sat down on his chest and reflected that it was high time to consider some means of escape.

Meanwhile the tiger bounded and jumped, sometimes swaying unpleasantly near. One conclusion I came to while watching—that the circular movement was governed by the action of the tail, and that this was an intermittent control effected by many incalculable trifles.

I must have been sitting so for over an hour before the mechanical force of the toy showed signs of slackening; from first to last the performance must have occupied nearly three hours. If it could hold on so long at high pressure, it seemed pretty clear that it might have sustained its first walking pace for a whole day.

So I argued as, with feebler and feebler bounds, the contrivance worked itself out. What struck my humour was that the last movements were accompanied by a buzzing sound that might have come from the mechanism of a clockwork train. And this mental vision gave me the clue to the nature of the Rajah's "magic wand." It was an exaggerated clock-key, no more.

When the thing had quite run out, I penetrated into the inner chamber in search of this key, and with the aid of a match found the electric light button and switched it on. The place was empty save for a few simple tools in a rack, and the object of my quest leaning against the wall that it had, however, at one time been the home of a real tiger, I judged from its shape to be probable.

Returning to the toy I subjected it, somewhat gingerly I must confess, to examination. In the centre of the chest I found the winding hole and inserted the key. I had not given it a quarter turn when the great jaw crashed down on my head, half stunning me. Fortunately the other limbs did not move, and the mouth shut again after the second snap. Clearly I had to find the method of controlling the engine before I dared give it power. I passed my hand over the withers, and found there seven small circular knobs such as are attached to wash-house pipes. Not without some misgivings I climbed up on the animal's back to look at them. Brushing the hair aside, I read on each respectively—"*Rechtes Vorbein*, *Linkes Vorbein*, *Hinterbeine*, *Kinnenbachen*, *Schwanz*, *Augen*, and *Zerstorung*."

The certainty of liberty sprang up within me, for I knew I could manage the machine with these handles. Did not *Rechtes Vorbein* and *Linkes Vorbein* mean off and near fore-legs; *Hinterbeine*, hind legs; *Kinnenbachen*, jaw; *Schwanz*, tail; and *Augen*, eyes?.... But what did *Zerstorung* mean? My thin German vocabulary did not contain the word. I had seen the animal use its legs, jaw, and tail, and its eyes light up, but could think of nothing else. I felt the handle: unlike the others it was turned off. There was no time for further consideration, so I turned off the others and descended to wind up the monster. It was a stiff job, and took me nearly twenty minutes. When it was finished I gave the three handles controlling the legs each a very slight twist. With a jerk the beast began to move, and, being uncontrolled by the action of its tail, bounced straight into the wall with a tremendous thud which shook the whole building. There its limbs still kept on working. Fearful of an upset, I jumped up and turned off the machinery.

I was now in a great dilemma to know how to get its head round again, the thing being much too heavy for my mere strength to be of any avail. To set it going again might overturn it, and that would be the ruin of my scheme.

I decided to try the effect of the off fore-paw alone, and set it gently in motion. This produced no useful result, merely causing the animal to vibrate, so I turned it off and tried the tail, which made the apparatus rock violently, but neither did any good. Not to be beaten without a struggle, I tried both tail and leg together. This was the secret: the beast lumbered round, carrying away great chunks of masonry with its paws.

Determined to thoroughly master the steering gear before going any further, as soon as the thing was clear I mounted on its back and cautiously set it going. When I thought I

I REMOVED HIS OUTER GARMENTS AND LITTERED THEM ON OVER MY PERSON.

had room to turn, I stopped the near fore-leg, with the consequence that the beast swung sharply round, pitching me over his shoulder on to the still prostrate Rajah, but for whose intervention I might have broken my neck. I was on my feet just in time to save the beast from crashing into the wall.

Mounting again, I continued my experiments, with the result that in half an hour's time I was able to describe the figure of eight, and perform other exercises of the riding-school. When I thought myself fairly efficient, I again wound the animal up to the full, worked it into position for departure, and turned my attention to the Rajah. He had recovered consciousness, and regarded me with considerable dislike as I removed his outer garments and pulled them on over my uniform, along with his sword and other accoutrements. I also replaced my helmet by his turban.

He strove to work the gag out of his mouth, probably to invite me to kill him, for he was a proud man in his way, but I affected to ignore him, thinking that the most irritating treatment to which I could subject him.

Night was descending, and it behoved me to be off. To steer the beast out of the cage was a ticklish job, and before I could attempt to do it, it was necessary to force back the ponderous temple doors. By this time I had been nearly forty hours without solid food, and the strain on my weakened muscles made me tremble all over. So little nerve was then left to me after my exertions, that I did not dare to ride the animal out; but, setting it in motion, took my place in rear. It was as well I did so, for it brushed the bars near enough to have mangled my leg had I been on it. The court-yard reached, I clambered to my perch again, exulting in my success. . . . But only for an instant. Blackly in the gloom stood up the outer gate with its inexorable bars.

In my nervous state I was prostrated by this check. It seemed an end to all my hopes. Stopping the tiger, I stared painfully into the gathering darkness. Was I only a rat after all? Would the Rajah get the better of me? My impulse was to go back, make an end of him, and of myself across his body. But even then the slaying of a man in cold blood was abhorrent to me. Better to make one desperate effort to break out.

Digging my hands into the long hair, I crouched low as possible on the tiger's back, and turned the first four handles as far as they would go.

The golden tiger rose in the air, came heavily to earth, and as it rose again I shut my eyes. There was a crash as of the crack of doom, the whole world staggered round me, and I thought my head was splitting—a great jerk—I opened my eyes and found we were bounding into unfathomable night at the speed of an express train. I dared not attempt to steer the animal at such a pace, which, indeed, threatened to shake myself and it to fragments; so, as uniformly as I could, I reversed all the handles.

When the speed was sufficiently reduced for me to use my eyes, we had left the ramp far behind and were chasing across a sandy plain. Whither I could not judge. From behind arose a great uproar of voices, and the discharge of the Rajah's seven pounder gun, which none but he could handle, proclaimed that he was again at large.

The moon came up and told me that I was heading due south across the Rhatameyan plateau, which extended for some fifteen miles in front of me till the mountains again arose. At my present reduced pace I ought to traverse this distance in five quarters of an hour. Then if I could strike the mountain road it should not be very difficult to gallop past the guard-house, leap the barrier, and be off up the mountain ere a bullet could stay me.

But the Rajah had not done with me yet, I found. One of his first acts must have been to wire a warning to the outpost, and as I approached the guard-house was ablaze with light, and I saw some score of men armed with rifles thrown forward into the plain. I stopped the tiger, so that the noise might not give them knowledge of my presence before I had settled my plans.

To gain the road was my only chance: but how to do it? To my horror I saw them lead out an elephant and anchor him across the path with the head towards me. At the same moment the galloping of horses came up on the wind behind. Cursing the momentary indecision which had added to my difficulties, I fumbled with my handles, but could not turn them on. At last my nerve had broken down.

The sweat broke out on my brow, and thinking I was about to fall from my perch I grabbed at the seventh handle.

I felt a tremendous concussion under me; there was a roar and a wave of fire, followed by smoke stinking of powder. I heard the

"NOT ALL RHATAMEH COULD STOP US NOW."

yells of frightened men, and the frantic trumpeting of the elephant.

As the vapour cleared I saw that the men opposed to me were gone, and that the elephant was lying prone in its chains.

The uproar of pursuit came nearer. Praising the gods, I turned the first three handles full on as before, and Kohilu bounded forward, once, twice, thrice—again this time we landed right on the elephant, trampling the poor squealing monster into the earth. But Kohilu, though he toppled heavily forward, did not fall. Up again he bounded forward into liberty. And not all Rhatamch could stop us now.

At dawn, after carrying me 120 miles, Kohilu received the contents of a British magazine rifle. It did not matter to Kohilu, and it told me a welcome tale. I had come on the bivouac of a regiment of Punjaubees. A taciturn Scots major was in command.

When he had listened to my story with a weary air, he remarked, "Made in Germany, of course. Everything's made in Germany nowadays."

By E. Nesbit.

IT all began with Effie's getting something in her eye. It hurt very much indeed, and it felt something like a red hot spark—only it seemed to have legs as well, and wings like a fly. Effie rubbed and cried—not real crying, but the kind your eye does all by itself without your being miserable inside your mind—and then she went to her father to have the thing in her eye taken out. Effie's father was a doctor, so of course he knew how to take things out of eyes—he did it very cleverly with a soft paint-brush dipped in castor-oil. When he had got the thing out, he said—

"This is very curious." Effie had often got things in her eye before, and her father had always seemed to think it was natural—rather tiresome and naughty perhaps, but still natural. He had never before thought it curious. She stood holding her handkerchief to her eye, and said—

"I don't believe it's out." People always say this when they have had something in their eyes.

"Oh, yes—it's *out*," said the doctor—"here it is on the brush. This is very interesting."

Effie had never heard her father say that about anything that she had any share in. She said "*What?*"

The doctor carried the brush very carefully across the room, and held the point of it under his microscope—then he twisted the brass screws of the microscope, and looked through the top with one eye.

"Dear me," he said. "Dear, *dear* me! Four well-developed limbs; a long caudal appendage; five toes, unequal in lengths, almost like one of the Lacertidæ, yet there are traces of wings." The creature under his eye wriggled a little in the castor-oil, and he went on: "Yes; a bat-like wing. A new specimen, undoubtedly. Effie, run round to the professor and ask him to be kind enough to step in for a few minutes."

"You might give me sixpence, daddy," said Effie, "because I did bring you the new specimen. I took great care of it inside my eye, and my eye *does* hurt."

The doctor was so pleased with the new specimen that he gave Effie a shilling, and presently the professor stepped round. He stayed to lunch, and he and the doctor quarrelled very happily all the afternoon about the name and the family of the thing that had come out of Effie's eye.

But at tea time another thing happened. Effie's brother Harry fished something out of his tea, which he thought at first was an earwig. He was just getting ready to drop it on the floor, and end its life in the usual way, when it shook itself in the spoon—spread two wet wings, and flopped on to the tablecloth. There it sat stroking itself with its feet and stretching its wings, and Harry said "Why, it's a tiny newt!"

The professor leaned forward before the doctor could say a word. "I'll give you half a crown for it, Harry, my lad," he said, speaking very fast, and then he picked it up carefully on his handkerchief.

"It is a new specimen," he said, "and finer than yours, doctor."

It was a tiny lizard, about half an inch long—with scales and wings.

So now the doctor and the professor each had a specimen, and they were both very pleased. But before long these specimens began to seem less valuable. For the next morning, when the knife-boy was cleaning the doctor's boots, he suddenly dropped the brushes and the boot and the blacking, and screamed out that he was burnt.

And from inside the boot came crawling a lizard as big as a kitten, with large, shiny wings.

"Why," said Effie, "I know what it is. It is a dragon like St. George killed."

And Effie was right. That afternoon Towser was bitten in the garden by a dragon about the size of a rabbit, which he had tried to chase, and next morning all the papers were full of the wonderful "winged lizards" that were appearing all over the country. The papers would not call them dragons, because, of course, no one believes in dragons nowadays—and at any rate the papers were not going to be so silly as to believe in fairy stories. At first there were only a few, but in a week or two the country was simply running alive with dragons of all sizes, and in the air you could sometimes see them as thick as a swarm of bees. They all looked alike except as to size. They were green with scales, and they had four legs and a long tail and great wings like bats' wings, only the wings were a pale, half-transparent yellow, like the gear-cases on bicycles.

And they breathed fire and smoke, as all proper dragons must, but still the newspapers went on pretending they were lizards, until the editor of the *Standard* was picked up and carried away by a very large one, and then the other newspaper people had not anyone left to tell them what they ought not to believe. So that when the largest elephant in the Zoo was carried off by a dragon, the papers gave up pretending—and put: "Alarming Plague of Dragons" at the top of the paper.

And you have no idea how alarming it was, and at the same time how aggravating. The large-sized dragons were terrible certainly, but when once you had found out that the dragons always went to bed early because they were afraid of the chill night air, you had only to stay indoors all day, and you were pretty safe from the big ones. But the smaller sizes were a perfect nuisance. The ones as big as earwigs got in the soap, and they got in the butter. The ones as big as dogs got in the bath, and the fire and smoke inside them made them steam like anything when the cold water tap was turned on, so that careless people were often scalded quite severely. The ones that were as large as pigeons would get into work-baskets or corner drawers, and bite you when you were in a hurry to get a needle or a handkerchief. The ones as big as sheep were easier to avoid, because you could see them coming; but when they flew in at the windows and curled up under your eider-down, and you did not find them till you went to bed, it was always a shock. The ones this size did not eat people, only lettuces, but they always scorched the sheets and pillow-cases dreadfully.

Of course, the County Council and the police did everything that could be done. It was no use offering the hand of the Princess to any one who killed a dragon. This way was all very well in olden times—when there was only one dragon and one Princess; but now there were far more dragons than Princesses—although the Royal Family was a large one. And besides, it would have been mere waste of Princesses to offer rewards for killing dragons, because everybody killed as many dragons as they could quite out of their own heads and without rewards at all, just to get the nasty things out of the way. The County Council undertook to cremate all dragons delivered at their offices between the hours of ten and two, and whole waggon-loads and cart loads and truck-loads of dead dragons could be seen any day of the week standing in a long line in the street where the County Council lived. Boys brought barrow-loads

"THE LARGEST ELEPHANT IN THE ZOO WAS CARRIED OFF"

of dead dragons, and children on their way home from morning school would call in to leave the handful or two of little dragons they had brought in their satchels, or carried in their knotted pocket handkerchiefs. And yet there seemed to be as many dragons as ever. Then the police stuck up great wood and canvas towers covered with patent glue. When the dragons flew against these towers, they stuck fast, as flies and wasps do on the sticky papers in the kitchen; and when the towers were covered all over with dragons, the police inspector used to set light to the towers, and burnt them and dragons and all.

And yet there seemed to be more dragons than ever. The shops were full of patent dragon poison and anti-dragon soap, and dragon proof curtains for the windows; and, indeed, everything that could be done was done.

And yet there seemed to be more dragons than ever.

It was not very easy to know what would poison a dragon, because you see they ate such different things. The largest kind ate elephants as long as there were any, and then went on with horses and cows. Another size ate nothing but lilies of the valley, and a third size ate only Prime Ministers if they were to be had, and, if not, would feed freely on boys in buttons. Another size lived on bricks, and three of them ate two-thirds of the South Lambeth Infirmary in one afternoon.

But the size Effie was most afraid of was about as big as your dining-room, and that size ate *little girls and boys*.

At first Effie and her brother were quite pleased with the change in their lives. It was so amusing to sit up all night instead of going to sleep, and to play in the garden lighted by electric lamps. And it sounded so funny to hear mother say, when they were going to bed—

"Good night, my darlings, sleep sound all day, and don't get up too soon. You must not get up before it's *quite* dark. You wouldn't like the nasty dragons to catch you."

But after a time they got very tired of it all: they wanted to see the flowers and trees growing in the fields, and to see the pretty sunshine out of doors, and not just through glass windows and patent dragon-proof curtains. And they wanted to play on the grass, which they were not allowed to do in the electric lamp-lighted garden because of the night dew.

And they wanted so much to get out, just for once, in the beautiful, bright, dangerous daylight, that they began to try and think of some reason why they *ought* to go out. Only they did not like to disobey their mother.

But one morning their mother was busy preparing some new dragon poison to lay down in

the cellars, and their father was bandaging the hand of the boot-boy which had been scratched by one of the dragons who liked to eat Prime Ministers when they were to be had, so nobody remembered to say to the children —

"Don't get up till it is quite dark!"

"Go now," said Harry, "it would not be disobedient to go. And I know exactly what we ought to do, but I don't know how we ought to do it."

"What ought we to do?" said Effie.

"We ought to wake St. George, of course," said Harry. "He was the only person in his town who knew how to manage dragons; the people in the fairy tales don't count. But St. George is a real person, and he is only asleep, and he is waiting to be waked up. Only nobody believes in St. George now. I heard father say so."

"*We* do," said Effie.

"Of course we do. And don't you see, Ef, that's the very reason why we could wake him? You can't wake people if you don't believe in them, can you?"

Effie said no, but where could they find St. George?

"We must go and look," said Harry, boldly. "You shall wear a dragon-proof frock, made of stuff like the curtains. And I will smear myself all over with the best dragon poison, and——"

Effie clasped her hands and skipped with joy, and cried —

"Oh, Harry! I know where we can find St. George! In St. George's Church, of course."

"Um," said Harry, wishing he had thought of it for himself, "you have a little sense sometimes, for a girl."

So next afternoon quite early, long before the beams of sunset announced the coming night, when everybody would be up and working, the two children got out of bed. Effie wrapped herself in a shawl of dragon-proof muslin—there was no time to make the frock—and Harry made a horrid mess of himself with the patent dragon poison. It was warranted harmless to infants and invalids, so he felt quite safe.

Then they took hands and set out to walk to St. George's Church. As you know, there are many St. George's churches, but, fortunately, they took the turning that leads to the right one, and went along in the bright sunlight, feeling very brave and adventurous.

There was no one about in the streets except dragons, and the place was simply swarming with them. Fortunately none of the dragons were just the right size for eating little boys and girls, or perhaps this story might have had to end here. There were dragons on the pavement, and dragons on the road-way, dragons basking on the front-door steps of public buildings, and dragons preening their wings on the roofs in the hot afternoon sun. The town was quite green with them. Even when the children had got out of the town and were walking in the lanes, they noticed that the fields on each side were greener than usual with the scaly legs and tails; and some of the smaller sizes had made themselves asbestos nests in the flowering hawthorn hedges.

Effie held her brother's hand very tight, and once when a fat dragon flopped against her ear she screamed out, and a whole flight of green dragons rose from the field at the sound, and sprawled away across the sky. The children could hear the rattle of their wings as they flew.

"Oh, I want to go home," said Effie.

"Don't be silly," said Harry. "Surely you haven't forgotten about the Seven Champions and all the Princes. People who are going to be their country's deliverers never scream and say they want to go home."

"And are we," asked Effie—"deliverers, I mean?"

"You'll see," said her brother, and on they went.

When they came to St. George's Church they found the door open, and they walked right in—but St. George was not there, so they walked round the churchyard outside, and presently they found the great stone tomb of St. George, with the figure of him carved in marble outside, in his armour and helmet, and with his hands folded on his breast.

"How ever can we wake him?" they said.

Then Harry spoke to St. George—but he would not answer, and he called, but St. George did not seem to hear; and then he actually tried to waken the great dragon-slayer by shaking his marble shoulders. But St. George took no notice.

Then Effie began to cry, and she put her arms round St. George's neck as well as she could for the marble, which was very much in the way at the back, and she kissed the marble face and she said:—

"Oh, dear, good, kind St. George, please wake up and help us."

And at that St. George opened his eyes

sleepily, and stretched himself and said: "What's the matter, little girl?"

So the children told him all about it; he turned over in his marble and leaned on one elbow to listen. But when he heard that there were so many dragons he shook his head.

"It's no good," he said, "they would be one too many for poor old George. You should have waked me before. I was always for a fair fight—one man one dragon, was my motto."

Just then a flight of dragons passed overhead, and St. George half drew his sword.

But he shook his head again, and pushed the sword back as the flight of dragons grew small in the distance.

"I can't do anything," he said; "things have changed since my time. St. Andrew told me about it. They woke him up over the engineers' strike, and he came to talk to me. He says everything is done by machinery now; there must be some way of settling these dragons. By the way, what sort of weather have you been having lately?"

This seemed so careless and unkind that Harry would not answer, but Effie said,

"PLEASE WAKE UP AND HELP US."

patiently, "It has been very fine. Father says it is the hottest weather there has ever been in this country."

"Ah, I guessed as much," said the Champion, thoughtfully. "Well, the only thing would be . . . . dragons can't stand wet and cold, that's the only thing. If you could find the taps."

St. George was beginning to settle down again on his stone slab.

"Good-night, very sorry I can't help you," he said, yawning behind his marble hand.

"Oh, but you can," cried Effie. "Tell us—what taps?"

"Oh, like in the bathroom," said St. George, still more sleepily; "and there's a looking-glass, too; shows you all the world

and what's going on. St. Denis told me about it; said it was a very pretty thing. I'm sorry I can't—good-night."

And he fell back into his marble and was fast asleep again in a moment.

"We shall never find the taps," said Harry. "I say, wouldn't it be awful if St. George woke up when there was a dragon near, the size that eats champions?"

Effie pulled off her dragon-proof veil. "We didn't meet any the size of the dining-room as we came along," she said; "I daresay we shall be quite safe."

So she covered St George with the veil, and Harry rubbed off as much as he could of the dragon poison on to St George's armour, so as to make everything quite safe for him.

"We might hide in the church till it is dark," he said, "and then——"

But at that moment a dark shadow fell on them, and they saw that it was a dragon exactly the size of the dining room at home.

So then they knew that all was lost. The dragon swooped down and caught the two children in his claws, he caught Effie by her green silk sash, and Harry by the little point at the back of his Eton jacket — and then, spreading his great yellow wings, he rose into the air, rattling like a third-class carriage when the brake is hard on.

"Oh, Harry," said Effie, "I wonder when he will eat us!"

The dragon was flying across woods and fields with great flaps of his wings that carried him a quarter of a mile at each flap.

Harry and Effie could see the country below, hedges and rivers and churches and farmhouses flowing away from under them, much faster than you see them running away from the sides of the fastest express train.

And still the dragon flew on. The children saw other dragons in the air as they went, but the dragon who was as big as the dining room never stopped to speak to any of them, but just flew on quite steadily.

"He knows where he wants to go," said Harry. "Oh, if he would only drop us before he gets there!"

"HE ROSE INTO THE AIR, RATTLING LIKE A THIRD-CLASS CARRIAGE."

But the dragon held on tight, and he flew and flew and flew until at last, when the children were quite giddy, he settled down, with a rattling of all his scales, on the top of a mountain. And he lay there on his great

green scaly side, panting, and very much out of breath, because he had come such a long way. But his claws were fast in Effie's sash and the little point at the back of Harry's Eton jacket.

Then Effie took out the knife Harry had given her on her birthday. It only cost sixpence to begin with, and she had had it a month, and it never could sharpen anything but slate-pencils, but somehow she managed to make that knife cut her sash in front, and crept out of it, leaving the dragon with only a green silk bow in one of his claws. That knife would never have cut Harry's jacket-tail off, though, and when Effie had tried for some time she saw that this was so, and gave it up. But with her help Harry managed to wriggle quietly out of his sleeves, so that the dragon had only an Eton jacket in his other claw. Then the children crept on tip-toe to a crack in the rocks and got in. It was much too narrow for the dragon to get in also, so they stayed in there and waited to make faces at the dragon when he felt rested enough to sit up and begin to think about eating them. He was very angry, indeed, when they made faces at him, and blew out fire and smoke at them, but they ran farther into the cave so that he could not reach them, and when he was tired of blowing he went away.

"ONE SIDE OF THE ROOM WAS JUST A BIG LOOKING-GLASS."

But they were afraid to come out of the cave, so they went farther in, and presently the cave opened out and grew bigger, and the floor was soft sand, and when they had come to the very end of the cave there was a door, and on it was written "*Universal Tap-room. Private. No one allowed inside.*"

So they opened the door at once just to peep in, and then they remembered what St. George had said.

"We can't be worse off than we are," said Harry, "with a dragon waiting for us outside. Let's go in."

So they went boldly into the tap-room, and shut the door behind them.

And now they were in a sort of room cut out of the solid rock, and all along one side of the room were taps, and all the taps were labelled with china labels like you see to baths. And as they could both read words of two syllables or even three sometimes, they understood at once that they had got to the place where the weather is turned on from. There were six big taps labelled "Sunshine," "Wind," "Rain," "Snow," "Hail," "Ice," and a lot of little ones, labelled "Fair to moderate," "Showery," "South breeze," "Nice growing weather for the crops," "Skating," "Good open weather," "South wind," "East wind," and so on. And the big tap labelled "Sunshine" was turned full on. They could not see any sunshine—the cave was lighted by a skylight of blue glass—so they supposed the sunlight was pouring out by some other way, as it does with the tap that washes out the underneath parts of patent sinks in kitchens.

Then they saw that one side of the room was just a big looking-glass, and when you looked in it you could see everything that was going on in the world—and all at once,

too, which is not like most looking-glasses They saw the carts delivering the dead dragons at the County Council offices, and they saw St George asleep under the dragon-proof veil. And they saw their mother at home crying because her children had gone out in the dreadful, dangerous daylight, and she was afraid a dragon had eaten them. And they saw the whole of England, like a great puzzle-map—green in the field parts and brown in the towns, and black in the places where they make coal, and crockery, and cutlery, and chemicals. And all over it, on the black parts, and on the brown, and on the green, there was a network of green dragons. And they could see that it was still broad daylight, and no dragons had gone to bed yet.

So Effie said, "Dragons do not like cold" And she tried to turn off the sunshine, but the tap was out of order, and that was why there had been so much hot weather, and why the dragons had been able to be hatched. So they left the sunshine-tap alone, and they turned on the snow and left the tap full on while they went to look in the glass. There they saw the dragons running all sorts of ways like ants if you are cruel enough to pour water into an ant-heap, which, of course, you never are. And the snow fell more and more

Then Effie turned the rain-tap quite full on, and presently the dragons began to wriggle less, and by-and-by some of them lay quite still, so the children knew the water had put out the fires inside them, and they were dead. So then they turned on the hail—only half on, for fear of breaking people's windows—and after a while there were no more dragons to be seen moving

Then the children knew that they were indeed the deliverers of their country.

"They will put up a monument to us," said Harry, "as high as Nelson's! All the dragons are dead."

"I hope the one that was waiting outside for us is dead!" said Effie; "and about the monument, Harry, I'm not so sure. What can they do with such a lot of dead dragons? It would take years and years to bury them, and they could never be burnt now they are so soaking wet I wish the rain would wash them off into the sea."

But this did not happen, and the children began to feel that they had not been so frightfully clever after all.

"I wonder what this old thing's for," said Harry He had found a rusty old tap, which seemed as though it had not been used for ages. Its china label was quite coated over with dirt and cobwebs. When Effie had cleaned it with a bit of her skirt - for curiously enough both the children had come out without pocket handkerchiefs - she found that the label said "*Waste.*"

"Let's turn it on," she said "it might carry off the dragons"

The tap was very stiff from not having been used for such a long time, but together they managed to turn it on, and then ran to the mirror to see what happened

Already a great, round, black hole had opened in the very middle of the map of England, and the sides of the map were tilting themselves up, so that the rain ran down towards the hole

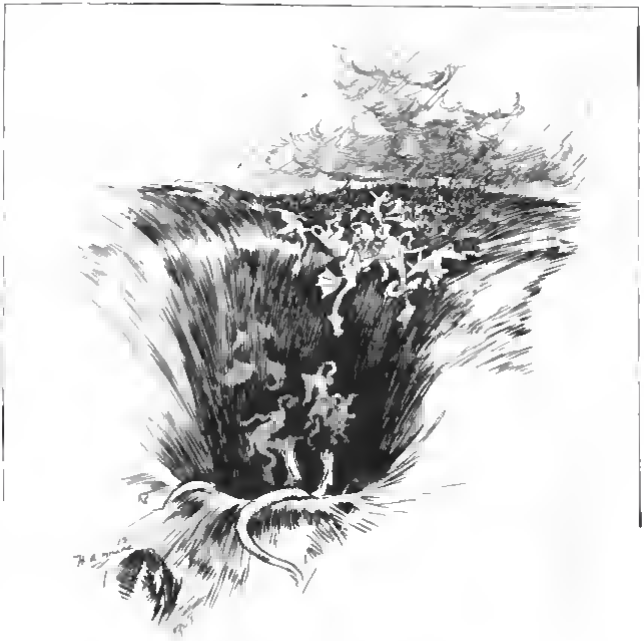
"Oh, hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!" cried Effie, and she hurried back to the taps and turned on everything that seemed wet. "Showery," "Good open weather," "Nice growing weather for the crops," and even "South" and "South West," because she had heard her father say that those winds brought rain

And now the floods of rain were pouring down on the country, and great sheets of water flowed towards the centre of the map, and cataracts of water poured into the great round hole in the middle of the map, and the dragons were being washed away and disappearing down the waste pipe in great green masses and scattered green shoals single dragons and dragons by the dozen of all sizes, from the ones that carry off elephants down to the ones that get in your tea.

And presently there was not a dragon left So then they turned off the tap named "Waste," and they half-turned off the one labelled "Sunshine" it was broken, so that they could not turn it off altogether and they turned on "Fair to moderate" and "Showery" and both taps stuck, so that they could not be turned off, which accounts for our climate

How did they get home again? By the Snowdon railway of course

And was the nation grateful? Well the nation was very wet. And by the time the nation had got dry again it was interested in the new invention for toasting muffins by electricity, and all the dragons were almost forgotten. Dragons do not seem so important when they are dead and gone, and, you know, there never was a reward offered



"DISAPPEARING DOWN THE WASTE-PIPE."

And what did father and mother say when Effie and Harry got home?

My dear, that is the sort of silly question you children always will ask. However, just for this once I don't mind telling you.

Mother said "Oh, my darlings, my darlings, you're safe—you're safe! You naughty children—how could you be so disobedient? Go to bed at once!"

And their father the doctor said —

"I wish I had known what you were going to do! I should have liked to preserve a specimen. I threw away the one I got out of Effie's eye. I intended to get a more perfect specimen. I did not anticipate this immediate extinction of the species."

The professor said nothing, but he rubbed his hands. He had kept his specimen—the one the size of an earwig that he gave Harry half a crown for—and he has it to this day.

You must get him to show it to you!

The Tax on Moustaches

BY H. J. W. DAM ILLUSTRATED BY JASPER SULLIVAN

[" *The Black Cat*," a magazine published at Boston, in the United States, recently offered prizes for the Short Stories sent in. The first prize, of the value of £200, was won by the following story which we have pleasure in bringing to the notice of readers on this side of the Atlantic.]

THE rivalry between Vincent and Halladay was bitter enough before Miss Belmayne appeared. It then assumed an aspect almost Corsican.

Vincent was the Rome correspondent of the London *Thunderer*. Halladay was the Roman representative of the London *National*. Vincent was an Oxford man, Halladay's intellectual credentials were dated at Cambridge. Vincent was of middle height, dark, lithe, and athletic. He had an electric energy, and quick, penetrating brown eyes, with a merry light in them that was attractive, also a brown moustache that approached the feminine ideal. Halladay was of stouter and flabbier build, with a blonde, sharp-pointed beard, and a face like Lord Salisbury's. Lord Salisbury was, in fact, secretly his model. He was the cousin of a peer, but notwithstanding this drawback had managed to develop a value of his own, which shows his great force and determination. He was also five years older than Vincent, who was only thirty-one; and in the game of life, if not of love, years have a distinct value of their own. Both men drew lavish salaries, moved in the highest society of Rome, and were polished carpet cavaliers and very popular. Both, too, had weaknesses which revealed their temperaments and are correlated forces in this narrative.

Vincent's weakness was a small sloop yacht which he kept at Naples for vacation cruises. Not having time, in the pressure of events, to love a woman, he loved his yacht. Whenever social, diplomatic, or international affairs did not command his attention, he and his pipe and the yacht had charming hours of mental communion together in his apartment. Whenever leave of absence permitted, the three did Capri, Sorrento, Ischia, and the adjacent Turner paintings of the Bay of Naples in congenial company. On stretching seas, in the calm and gorgeous afterglow, he dreamed of a possible fair one in the nebulous future. This showed his temperament to be romantic.

Halladay's weakness was "The War Cloud in the Balkans." Whenever other news failed he would knit his editorial brow and see ominous signs of trouble in Servia, Bulgaria, and the Balkan Provinces. One can always see ominous signs of trouble in Servia, Bulgaria, and the Balkan Provinces, and they make an excellent frame on which to hang long and sweeping periods dealing with possible international complications. From which it will be seen that Halladay was ambitious. He always used the most majestic polysyllables that fitted, and these won him the reputation of a powerful and far seeing correspondent, which reputation he confidently believed that he deserved.

These diverse temperaments caused the two men to secretly scorn each other, and this feeling was not diminished by their alternating newspaper triumphs, important bits of news from the Quirinal or the Ministries, which fell now to one and now to the other, and caused the usual variations of anger and delight.

Thus it was when Miss Belmayne and her parents arrived at the Grand Hotel for the winter. Parents are, of course, of no importance, but it may be mentioned that Mr. Belmayne had made stoves, and incidentally

accumulated two millions, on the shore of Lake Michigan. Miss Belmayne was one of those girls who, without effort, bowl over unprepared Englishmen like ten-pins. She had style, Paris style, and this, when the dressmaker is driven with an intelligent curb, is very fascinating. She was fairly tall, blonde, had ideas, dark-blue eyes, and a frank, sympathetic nature. All these exercised a novel and powerful influence on the two men. They met her on the same evening at a diplomatic reception. The charms mentioned were quite enough for Vincent. He went home, lighted his pipe, put on his slippers, looked at the fire, and said, "By Jove!" He said nothing more to the fire or anything else for two mortal hours. Then he said "By Jove!" again and went to bed. The same charms sufficed to stagger Halladay, but to them he added the two millions. He was older and more practical. He wrote his cousin the peer and told him to be sure to come to Rome that winter. Then he mentally watered his genealogical tree, resolved to lay siege to the beautiful Vicksburg with the firm patience of a Grant, and absently took a cold bath. This chilled him, at midnight, but did not check his ardour.

MISS BELMAYNE.

Miss Belmayne took Rome and the Forum and the Coliseum very seriously. This was a novelty to Vincent and Halladay, so they awoke to its grandeur, and took it very seriously indeed. They sent her books, and bronzes, and prehistoric pavements, and fragments of ancient palaces by the cartload. Papa Belmayne, who was indulgent, said he didn't particularly care for a macadamized drawing-room, and engaged another room to hold the ancient architecture. The attentions of the two men soon became constant and very marked. And through archæological mornings and afternoon drives, on the blocks of the Forum and the steps of the Coliseum, on the Pincian Hill and the roof of St. Peter's, they fell deeper and deeper in love, but kept their own counsel. The dear girl was as yet unconscious of it, but they hated each other with the hate of the 1850-60 dramas. It was anything—all—to win the adorable beauty and sentence the other fellow to life long despair.

The primal cause of all the subsequent trouble was Vincent's yacht. He had, on various occasions, shown Miss Belmayne the high responsibility of his position as correspondent of the *Thunderer*. Now and then he wrote his despatches at her hotel, after dinner, and two days later would read her the powerful, ponderous *Thunderer* editorials, which, telegraphed all over Europe, were based upon the despatches sent by him. This interested her tremendously. Like every true American girl of nowadays — in her ante-matrimonial, ante-babies - of - her - own period — she secretly longed to sway nations. To write despatches which set Europe and America in a ferment, which caused Salisbury, the German Emperor, and the Czar to instantly buckle on their skates, as it were, and dash off to do something final, seemed to her the only occupation worthy of woman or of man. She found nothing so delightful as helping him, and he knew nothing so delightful as her help, notwithstanding that the hotel note-paper was scarcely the proper stationery to bear this freight of heavy thought. When the *Thunderer* arrived she would read the despatches with a thrill of interest born of her indirect connection with the great newspaper. Finally she wanted to write a despatch — just a little one—all by herself. He, reserving rights of correction and revision, consented. It was a safe contribution, not at all sensational, about the returns of the olive crop. She wrote it. She also read it, word for word, in print two days later. That experience was a crisis in her life. Destiny opened out its arms to her as a woman of might and power. Halladay lost ground visibly after that, and

had emotional neuralgia of the most torturing kind.

The cause of the trouble, as before stated, was the yacht. A dirty steam trader from Marseilles, while coming to anchor, had taken off the bowsprit of Vincent's secondary idol, together with a large slice of her peerless nose. It was like an accident to a highly esteemed female cousin. The best medical attention was instantly necessary. Vincent knew the Italians. He knew that, if he did not personally arrange the contract for repairs at Naples, the contractor who did them would afterwards own the yacht, bring suit against his personal fortune, and hold his family responsible for the balance of the money. In short, he had to go to Naples for two days. Miss Belmayne, strange to say, received the news with joy.

"I'll look after things. I'll send anything that's necessary to the *Thunderer*," she said.

He stared at her in astonishment.

"Oh, do let me! Please do! I want to show you the breadth of my mind."

Events were very dull, journalistically. And when a beautiful girl wants to show you the breadth of her mind it is not only dangerous to say "No," but wise to say "Yes," that is, if you are as much in love as he was. He finally consented and she radiated enthusiasm. "Just read the papers if you *do* send anything, and be guided by them," said he. "But don't—er—don't send *too* much, and nothing that isn't important." Then he went away to single combat with the contractor. She couldn't do him any harm. If what she sent was bad it wouldn't be printed. And his consent to the proposal would certainly do him infinite good in connection with another proposal. Thus he mused, in love, and in the train to Naples.

Now, it is doubtless fully understood by all adult persons that when an American girl desires to show the breadth of her mind she is destined to show it at all hazards. The responsibility of her position weighed heavily upon Miss Belmayne. She came down to breakfast next morning with a far-away look in her eyes and two brown prima-donna hair-curlers still nestling in the soft silken hair above her forehead. Papa Belmayne at first assumed that this was a new style in breakfast toilets, and said nothing. He could never keep quite abreast of the fashions, and he had made mistakes before. Then he conceived that it might possibly be an evidence of strong, disturbing emotion, and ventured to inquire. She gravely removed the hair-curlers, and after striking her hair three skilful taps put them in her pocket. Then she cautiously whispered to him the news. She, SHE, was the Acting Rome Correspondent of the *Thunderer*! Papa was startled. It flashed instantly upon his practical Chicago mind that with a wire like that something might be done in wheat. But, no—on second thought—that wouldn't do. Still, he was proud, very proud, of his daughter. He proceeded to like Vincent amazingly.

"SHE WOULD READ THE DESPATCHES."

"We'll give the old *Thunderer* a lift, my dear, if anything happens. I'll furnish the statesmanship and you look out for the spelling and punctuation," said he. Halladay he had never liked. That gentleman's family tree and its luxuriant foliage had been exhibited several times in his presence, and it annoyed him. Not having dealt largely in trees in his career, he didn't believe in them. So Vincent stock rose clear above the hundred mark in the Belmayne family, and Halladays fell steadily to zero, with no offers.

Halladay knew this and fumed in secret. He also guessed at once from Miss Belmayne's words and questions the foolish thing that Vincent had done. He saw in it not only a clever move of his rival, but also an opportunity to spoil Vincent's chances and win Miss Belmayne with a single safe play.

He was devoted but thoughtful all that afternoon. Then he went away and meditated.

At ten that evening he entered the Belmayne drawing-room, sharp-pointed, immaculate, and smiling with a visible air of conscious triumph.

"Ha, ha, ha! Sorry for Vincent. Pity he's away," he said.

"Oh, what has happened? I've read all the evening papers," said the Acting Correspondent.

"Can't say, you know. Must keep a good thing to myself when I get it."

"Is it a very good thing?"

"Very."

"Is it a *big* thing?" This with fear and trembling.

"Biggest in months. May cause a rebellion in Italy. You know these Italians. Hair-trigger sort of people when anything happens that they don't quite like."

"Oh, Mr. Halladay, please tell me!"

He proceeded not to tell her, for the next half hour, in the cleverest way possible. He dangled the bait before her and cruelly enjoyed her attempts to seize it. He saw with concealed fury, however, that her anxiety was the tender anxiety that he most greatly feared. This armed him in his resolve, and having excited her curiosity till it was painful, he went downstairs.

HALLADAY

"What is it, my dear?" said Belmayne.

Miss Belmayne was dumb with disappointment. She loved Vincent—she knew it in that moment—and he would be dreadfully beaten, without excuse, and perhaps lose his position. Because of their compact he had even failed to notify the *Thunderer* of his absence.

"I've missed the greatest news of the year," she said, sharply. "Do go down to the smoking-room. They're sure to be talking about it. Follow Halladay, and see to whom he speaks. We *must* get something about it."

Papa Belmayne was stout, vigorous, fifty-five, and came from Chicago. His hair was curly and showed only a few white lines. Spurred by parental love and a desire for something to do that was slowly undermining his constitution, he followed Halladay like the species of hound which is called sleuth. His eyes twinkled and his blood was up. He had always known that anybody can be a newspaper correspondent, and he enjoyed trying it. He quickly found Halladay in the smoking-room and kept his eye on him. Halladay observed this and was deeply glad. It was as he had hoped. Belmayne had fallen heels over head into his trap.

Halladay was in earnest, low-toned conversation with Sir George Perleybore, a tall, thin, white-haired, perfectly groomed baronet, of any age above sixty-five, the kind of lay figure met everywhere in the best hotels of the south of Europe during winter. Sir George was astonished. Papa Belmayne saw this plainly, and lay low like Brer Rabbit. Halladay finally went away. Papa then greeted Sir George carelessly and proposed a whisky-and-soda. Also cigars. Sir George said: "Most extraordinary! Wouldn't have believed it. What'll these beggars do next?" Papa swelled with repressed eagerness. Then it all came out. He got it — every word of it — and chuckled at his own diplomacy. Then he flew to the elevator.

"Now I know what I'm talking about, my dear," he said, when her burst of joy was over. "I understand these things and you don't. I haven't been a State senator two terms for nothing. You sit down and take your pen and I'll dictate."

Papa expanded like a balloon, walked the floor, and dictated. He measured every word by cubic measurement. He dictated the short despatch four times and half of another time in all. She wrote and scratched out and turned the dictionary pages feverishly, and thought how clearly Edward would see the breadth of her mind.

And neither Edward nor the *Thunderer* knew the doom that was impending.

When the despatch was finally completed she knew that she could have expressed it much more elegantly, but papa was inexorable.

He'd tell the story in America, by jiminy, and he wanted to read his own despatch in the London *Thunderer*. So she copied it in a bold, round hand, signed Vincent's cipher, gave it to Vincent's commissionaire, who

"PAPA EXPANDED LIKE A BALLOON

called at eleven, and both she and papa went to bed feeling very well indeed.

At ten o'clock the next morning—Roman time—the face of Europe wore a fearful geographical frown. Consternation, perplexity, and uncertainty ruled in five empires. From Downing Street the news went under the Channel to the Paris Elysée and overland to the winter palaces of Berlin, Vienna, and St. Petersburg. In her honest attempt to sway nations, the dear girl had succeeded. The Thrones sent messengers to the Foreign Offices; the Foreign Offices wired the Ambassadors, and neither wire nor cable could work half fast enough to please the respective senders. When the Stock Exchanges opened, Italian Rentes fell six points, and their allies weakened in proportion. The smash had come. Italy was bankrupt and the Triple Alliance would fall to pieces. It all arose from a despatch and a leading article in the columns of the London *Thunderer*, those columns which were held to be as infallible as the multiplication table itself. This was the despatch:—

ITALY.

[*From our own Correspondent.*]

I saw Signor Crespo this evening, and learned from him that the new and important item in the Budget, the new source of revenue which has been promised and upon which great hopes have been based, will take the form of a national tax upon moustaches. In his Bill, which he will introduce in the Chamber to-morrow, it will be provided that every citizen of Italy wearing a moustache shall pay a sumptuary tax thereupon of one lira yearly. In the ordinary course this tax will yield the twenty million lire per annum which are so greatly needed and whose source up to now it has been impossible to discover. Of course a certain amount of opposition from the Left is confidently to be expected. The tax on moustaches will undoubtedly afford an opportunity to the Socialists to champion individual rights and protest against interference therewith; but on the other hand, the Clerical wing are certain to view the innovation with favour. The popular acceptation of the measure is, however, difficult to forecast.

This was probably the most nonsensical despatch that has ever appeared in any newspaper, great or small. The editor had looked at it, incredulous. The leader writer said, "H'm, it's neck or nothing with Crespo." Only Vincent's cipher and the condition of Italy made belief possible, but it was believed. This was the leader—

The extraordinary course which has been adopted by the Prime Minister of Italy in order to replenish the national treasury is so radical an extension of the general principle of taxation that neither its wisdom nor its result can yet be declared with any degree of certainty. Statistics do not, unfortunately, furnish us with the number of Italian citizens who at the period of the last census were wearing moustaches. It is a well known fact, however, that the custom of cultivating hair in an ornamental form upon the upper lip is, perhaps, more firmly established as a national habit in Italy than in any other country of the world at the present time. The first lesson of this proposed legislation is its certain indication of the extreme, if not hopeless, financial straits into which the monarchy has fallen. The second is the very doubtful character of the tax itself as a reliable source of revenue, when viewed from the standpoints of expediency and of successful enforcement. It will be necessary for legislation to establish with perfect clearness not only what a moustache legally is, but

also at what age, both of the wearer and of the moustache itself, it becomes taxable, and in these two directions, to say nothing of the popular acceptance or rejection of the measure, the visible difficulties are both many and great, etc., etc.

On that very afternoon a man in a yachting suit went over the side of a yacht at Naples and was rowed to the pier. He was happy and buoyant with the buoyant happiness of the man who loves and is loved. Upon reaching the pier he bought the second edition of the *Corrière di Napoli*, and glanced at the telegraph columns. The *Thunderer* despatch had been cabled back to Naples, and under sensational headlines was the first to meet his eye.

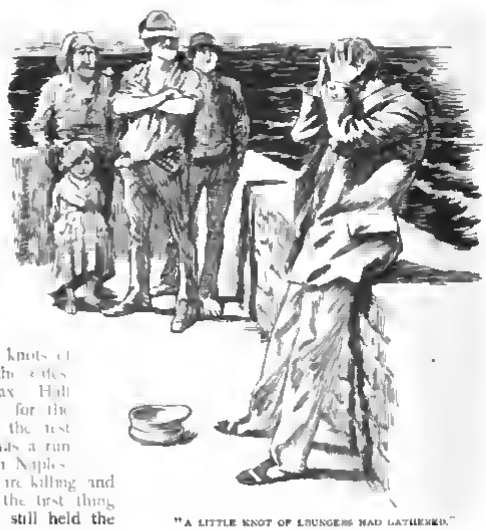
His first thought was that he was losing his mind and inventing the telegram. Then something flashed upon him, and his heart seemed to stop beating. He staggered to the curb of the pier, sat down, and shut his eyes. He was never sure afterwards whether he fainted or not. For five minutes he knew only the silent whirl of agonized thoughts. He grasped at once what had happened. It was Halladay's work, and Halladay had ruined him. The *Thunderer* was the laughing-stock of Europe, and he, as the responsible sender of that despatch, was journalistically done for. Ambition spoke first, and the pain was of the bitterest. Love spoke next, but with all his rage and despair he could not find the power to be harsh to Miss Belmayne. "The dear girl!" he said. "She did her best, and that scoundrel fooled her completely. Oh, oh, oh!" And he squeezed his head with his hands as if to shut out the thought of his position and the inevitable consequences that he must face.

A little knot of loungers had gathered, his evident pain exciting their sympathy. This recalled him to himself, and he took a cab and drove away. Little knots of men stood in front of all the cafés excitedly discussing the new tax. Half of them were clean shaven for the first time in their lives, and the rest were about to be. There was a run on every hairdresser's shop in Naples. The Italian is poor, the taxes are killing, and the art of dodging them is the first thing taught to children. Vincent still held the paper, and now read its comments on the tax. They combined a scream of sarcastic laughter with a howl of furious rage. Italy had been touched on the spot that was tenderest. But—and here was a gleam of hope—the reputation of the *Thunderer* was so high that the despatch had been taken seriously. The "sell" had not yet been exposed. If only Crespo would save him—but, no! Crespo's position, already imperilled by a crisis, was worse than his own. Crespo would want to shoot him on the spot.

He caught the 2.40 train and rode to Rome in a state of numbness. What he would do to Halladay he did not dare to think. He was a man in a rage, a hungry, thirsty rage, that threatened to overpower him. Nor did he dare to go to his apartment. There lay the telegram dismissing him in derision and contempt. In his sorrow his heart turned to love for consolation. Arrived at Rome he drove to the hotel, entered Miss Belmayne's drawing room with a white, sad face, and sat in the shadow.

The Acting Correspondent came in radiant, beaming with pride and pleasure over her shrewdness and success.

"Have you seen it? It's in the Roman papers. You didn't get beaten. Oh, I was



"A LITTLE KNOT OF LOUNGERS HAD GATHERED."

so worried, and *so* happy when I knew you were safe!"

She stopped, mystified at his silence. Then she saw his pallor and his expression.

"Are you ill? What is it? What's the matter?"

He tried to spare her, tried to pass the matter over lightly. But the moment she knew that the despatch had caused his trouble all subterfuges were useless. Her face, too, grew white, and she kept on asking him question after question, till she fully understood the effect of what she had done. His ruin was certain, but his replies were gentle, quiet, and full of sympathy. Then the society girl known as Miss Belmayne disappeared, and the woman in her came out. His career was ended, and through his love for her. The big, beautiful girl stood up, tried to say she was sorry, but couldn't. Her lips only quivered and wouldn't work. Then she sat down, bolt upright on the sofa, and the tears came first creeping and then tumbling down from her eye-lashes as she cried, broken-hearted, without a word or a handkerchief. He tried to soothe her, to say it was nothing. "Oh, Edward!" was all she said.

In spite of his grief he observed the word "Edward."

Upon this interesting and unconventional social tableau bustled in Papa Belmayne, of Chicago, milhonaire and newspaper correspondent. He saw a white young man and a young person bathed in tears.

"Wha—what's the matter?" said he, starting and peering over his eye-glasses.

"I'm done for, but it's all my own fault," said the young man.

Papa inquired and was told. He sat down suddenly in a state of collapse.

"If that sneak comes here again, I'll cowhide him," he said, exploding. "I'll thrash him anyhow. Anyhow!" he roared, with the rage of an honest man who has been beaten at his own game.

Then several minutes of sad, solemn silence ensued, each trying to find a ray of light in the gloom.

"Why don't you see Crespo? He's a friend of yours, isn't he?" said Belmayne.

"He has been."

"Then come on. Laura, you come with us. We did it. We're responsible, and we'll take the blame. Crespo is the only man that can save you. Here! Order me a carriage!" he shouted to the maid.

The combative financier, who had faced and won a hundred battles that were real battles, was not to be daunted by a Prime Minister and a newspaper and a little thing like this. His courage, of course, infected his daughter. With father at the helm every thing would, of course, be all right. It must be all right. So she hoped once more, and darted away for hat-pins. While waiting for her and the hat-pins at the elevator another thing occurred. Belmayne put his hand in a friendly way on Vincent's shoulder and said: "Young man, don't you worry. If you have to give up journalism, you may possibly do much better than that. I know you, and I like you." Vincent nodded quietly. The implied promise was well meant, but it did not appeal to him just then. They drove to the Quirinal Hill in silence. The Acting Correspondent merely asked her father if her hat was on straight. She secretly proposed to take the Prime Minister by storm.

"'OH, EDWARD!' WAS ALL SHE SAID."

Now, during all these woful occurrences Chance, which, as everybody knows, is the prime minister of Providence, was playing tricks upon another Prime Minister, the temporary ruler of Italy. Signor Crespo was at his wits' end over the new tax measures. In order to pass them he had to yield to the demands of the Socialist-Anarchist wing of his party, and if he failed

to pass them he fell from power. One alternative was as distasteful as the other, and he was rapidly growing grey in his efforts to find a way out of the dilemma. When the *Thunderer* despatch was brought him he jumped to his feet in amazement. Then he scratched his head and said, "Ah!" Then he smiled a smile of joy. He foresaw something.

Two minutes afterwards the double doors of his private room were burst open and a portly marquis, one of his enemies in the Cabinet, rushed in and said: "Crespo—for Heaven's sake——"

The Prime Minister said nothing.

Other high politicians of his party, rivals and enemies, rushed in and cried: "Crespo—for Heaven's sake——"

Signor Crespo said nothing.

The King sent a noble duke hot-footed to say: "Crespo—for Heaven's sake——"

The Prime Minister still said nothing, but in different words.

In half an hour they were all on their knees, all the opposing elements he had spent months in trying to combine. They accepted the tax on moustaches as a fact, and saw that, in revenge on them, he was going to ruin the party. They begged him not to propose it. He consented—on conditions. They agreed abjectly to his terms, told him to count on their votes, and, when the Chamber met, passed his Budget, which they had previously agreed to defeat, by a huge majority.

This is why the Prime Minister, who had made inquiries, was also eager to see the Acting Correspondent who had sent that despatch. Being a devout man, however, he looked upon the real sender as Providence.

The carriage party entered the Ministry. To Vincent it seemed to be wrapped in accusing gloom. It was his farewell to the Prime Minister, both as friend and correspondent. Nevertheless, he wrote on his card: "With Mr. and Miss Belmayne to explain that despatch."

They were silently ushered in and stood in the great man's presence, three drooping figures, guilty and downcast. Belmayne was not happy. He was not used to cringing before anybody. Laura's eyes were full of new tears. She would sway no more nations, whatever the temptation. Vincent was pale and grave.

For some reason the Prime Minister began to laugh. He had not felt like laughing for three months, and he enjoyed the feeling. He laughed till the tears came into his eyes.

Vincent was angry.

"Does it strike you as comical?" said he.

"Comical? It's providential. See here," said Signor Crespo, pointing to a pile of at least a hundred telegrams. "All Europe wants information about your despatch. I mean Miss Belmayne's despatch," he said, bowing gracefully.

"Then you—you understand how it happened?"

"Yes."

"And, of course, you—you've exposed it?"

"Oh, no. They thought I meant it. It has saved the situation."

"What?" said Vincent, thunderstruck.

"And in return, my friend, I have saved you. The *Thunderer*, unable to get an answer from you, telegraphed me for indorsement. I sent this —

"The *Thunderer*, London.

"In consequence of concessions from opposing elements I shall not present my proposed tax on moustaches. "CRESPO."

"BY JOVE!" said Vincent.

"EDWARD!" screamed somebody.

"Hurrah!" said Belmayne.

And Edward's arms were filled with sudden millinery, and two hearts were filled with deepest joy.

Two events of different kinds succeeded.

Halladay was abused by the *National* for missing the most important news of the year. When he gave a true explanation of the matter he was scoffed at. It was visibly false. He then proceeded to turn to a pale but not unbecoming green colour. The doctors said liver; the cause was unrequited love.

The other event was a social function of a happy, even hilarious, character, at the Grand Hotel. This is not of importance, however, in a country where orange-blossoms are indigenous.

By E Nesbit.

THIS is the tale of the wonders that befell on the evening of the 11th of December, when they did what they were told not to do. You may think that you know all the unpleasant things that could possibly happen to you if you are disobedient, but there are some things which even you do not know, and they did not know them either.

Their names were George and Jane.

There were no fireworks that year on Guy Fawkes' Day, because the heir to the throne was not well. He was cutting his first tooth, and that is a very anxious time for any person—even for a Royal one. He was really very poorly, so that fireworks would have been in the worst possible taste, even at Land's End or in the Isle of Man, whilst in Forest Hill, which was the home of Jane and George, anything of the kind was quite out of the question. Even the Crystal Palace, empty headed as it is, felt that this was no time for Catherine-wheels.

But when the Prince had cut his tooth, rejoicings were not only admissible but correct, and the 11th of December was proclaimed firework day. All the people were most anxious to show their loyalty, and to enjoy themselves at the same time. So there were fireworks and torchlight processions, and set-pieces at the Crystal Palace, with "Blessings on our Prince" and "Long Live our Royal Darling" in different coloured fires; and the most private of boarding schools had a half holiday, and even the children of plumbers and authors had tuppence each given them to spend as they liked.

George and Jane had sixpence each—and they spent the whole amount in a "golden rain," which would not light for ever so long, and, when it did light, went out almost at once, so they had to look at the fireworks in the gardens next door, and at the ones at the Crystal Palace, which were very glorious indeed.

All their relations had colds in their heads, so Jane and George were allowed to go out into the garden alone to let off their firework. Jane had put on her fur cape and her thick gloves, and her hood with the silver fox fur on it which was made out of mother's old muff; and George had his overcoat with the three capes, and his comforter, and father's sealskin travelling cap with the pieces that come down over your ears.

It was dark in the garden, but the fireworks all about made it seem very gay, and though the children were cold they were quite sure that they were enjoying themselves.

They got up on the fence at the end of the garden to see better; and then they saw, very far away, where the edge of the dark world is, a shining line of straight, beautiful lights arranged in a row, as if they were the spears carried by a fairy army.

"Oh, how pretty," said Jane. "I wonder what they are. It looks as if the fairies were planting little shining baby poplar trees, and watering them with liquid light."

"Liquid fiddlestick!" said George. He had been to school, so he knew that these were only the Aurora Borealis, or Northern Lights. And he said so.

"But what *is* the Rory Bory what's-its-name?" asked Jane. "Who lights it, and what's it there for?"

George had to own that he had not learnt that.

"But I know," said he, "that it has something to do with the Great Bear, and the Dipper, and the Plough, and Charles's Wain."

"And what are they?" asked Jane.

"Oh, they're the surnames of some of the star families. There goes a jolly rocket," answered George, and Jane felt as if she almost understood about the star families.

The fairy spears of light twinkled and gleamed: they were much prettier than the big, blazing, blazing bonfire that was smoking and flaming and spluttering in the next door-but-one garden—prettier even than the coloured fires at the Crystal Palace.

"I wish we could see them nearer," Jane said. "I wonder if the star families are nice families—the kind that mother would like us to go to tea with, if we were little stars?"

"They aren't that sort of families at all, Silly," said her brother, kindly trying to explain. "I only said 'families' because a kid like you wouldn't have understood if I'd said constel . . . . . and, besides, I've forgotten the end of the word. Anyway, the stars are all up in the sky, so you can't go to tea with them."

"No," said Jane, "I said if we were little stars."

"But we aren't," said George.

"No," said Jane, with a sigh. "I know that. I'm not so stupid as you think, George. But the Rory Bories are somewhere at the edge. Couldn't we go and see *them*?"

"Considering you're eight, you haven't much sense." George kicked his boots against the paling to warm his toes. "It's half the world away."

"It looks very near," said Jane, hunching up her shoulders to keep her neck warm.

"They're close to the North Pole," said George. "Look here—I don't care a straw about the Aurora Borealis, but I shouldn't mind discovering the North Pole. It's awfully difficult and dangerous, and then you come home and write a book about it with a lot of pictures, and everybody says how brave you are."

Jane got off the fence.

"Oh, George, *let's*," she said. "We shall never have such a chance again—all alone by ourselves—and quite late, too."

"I'd go right enough if it wasn't for you," George answered, gloomily, "but you know they always say I lead you into mischief—and if we went to the North Pole we should get our boots wet, as likely as not, and you remember what they said about not going on the grass."

"They said the *lawn*," said Jane. "We're not going on the *lawn*. Oh, George, do, *do* let's. It doesn't look so *very* far—we could be back before they had time to get dreadfully angry."

"All right," said George, "but mind *I* don't want to go."

So off they went. They got over the fence, which was very cold and white and shiny because it was beginning to freeze, and on the other side of the fence was somebody else's garden, so they got out of that as quickly as they could, and beyond that was a field where there was another big bonfire, with people standing round it who looked quite black.

"It's like Indians," said George, and wanted to stop and look, but Jane pulled him on, and they passed by the bonfire and got through a gap in the hedge into another field—a dark one; and far away, beyond quite a number of other dark fields, the Northern Lights shone and sparkled and twinkled.

Now, during the winter the Arctic regions come much farther south than they are marked on the map. Very few people know this, though you would think they could tell it by the ice in the jugs of a morning. And just when George and Jane were starting for the North Pole, the Arctic regions had come down very nearly as far as Forest Hill, so that, as the children walked on, it grew colder and colder, and presently they saw that the fields were covered with snow, and there were great icicles hanging from all the hedges and

gates. And the Northern Lights still seemed some way off.

They were crossing a very rough, snowy field when Jane first noticed the animals. There were white rabbits and white hares, and all sorts and sizes of white birds, and some larger creatures in the shadows of the hedges which Jane was sure were wolves and bears.

"Polar bears and Arctic wolves, of course I mean," she said, for she did not want George to think her stupid again.

There was a great hedge at the end of this field, all covered with snow and icicles; but the children found a place where there was a hole, and as no bears or wolves seemed to be just in that part of the hedge, they crept through and scrambled out of the frozen ditch on the other side. And then they stood still and held their breath with wonder.

For in front of them, running straight and smooth right away to the Northern Lights, lay a great wide road of pure dark ice, and on each side were tall trees all sparkling with white frost, and from the boughs of the trees hung strings of stars threaded on fine moonbeams, and shining so brightly that it was like a beautiful fairy daylight. Jane said so, but George said it was like the electric lights at the Earl's Court Exhibition.

"THIS WAY TO THE NORTH POLE."

The rows of trees went as straight as ruled lines away—away and away—and at the other end of them shone the Aurora Borealis.

There was a sign post—of silvery snow—and on it in letters of pure ice the children read—

"*This way to the North Pole.*"

Then George said: "Way or no way, I know a slide when I see one—so here goes." And he took a run on the frozen snow, and Jane took a run when she saw him do it, and the next moment they were sliding away, each with feet half a yard apart, along the great slide that leads to the North Pole.

This great slide is made for the convenience of the Polar bears, who, during the winter months, get their food from the Army and Navy Stores—and it is the most perfect slide in the world. If you have never come across it, it is because you have never let off fireworks on the 11th of December, and have never been thoroughly naughty and disobedient. But do not be these things in the hope of finding the great slide—because you might find something quite different, and then you would be sorry.

The great slide is like common slides in this, that when once you have started you have to go on to the end—unless you fall down—and then it hurts just as much as the smaller kind on ponds. The great slide runs down hill all the way, so that you keep on going faster and faster and faster. George and Jane went so fast that they had not time to notice the scenery. They only saw the long lines of frosted trees and the starry lamps, and, on each side, rushing back as they slid on—a very broad, white world and a very large, black night, and overhead, as well as in the trees, the stars were bright like silver lamps, and, far ahead, shone and trembled and sparkled the line of fairy spears. Jane said that, and George said,

"I can see the Northern Lights quite plain."

It is very pleasant to slide and slide and slide on clear, dark ice—especially if you feel you are really going somewhere, and more especially if that somewhere is the North Pole. The children's feet made no noise on the ice, and they went on and on in a beautiful white silence. But suddenly the silence was shattered and a cry rang out over the snow

"Hi! You there! Stop!"

"Tumble for your life!" cried George, and he fell down at once, because it is the only way to stop. Jane fell on top of him—and then they crawled on hands and knees to the snow at the edge of the slide—and there was a sportsman, dressed in a peaked cap and a frozen moustache, like the one you see in the pictures about Ice-Peter, and he had a gun in his hand.

"You don't happen to have any bullets about you?" said he.

"No," George said, truthfully. "I had five of father's revolver cartridges, but they were taken away the day nurse turned out my pockets to see if I had taken the knob of the bath-room door by mistake."

"Quite so," said the sportsman, "these accidents will occur. You don't carry fire-arms, then, I presume?"

"I haven't any fire-*arms*," said George, "but I have a fire-*work*. It's only a squib one of the boys gave me, if that's any good"; and he began to feel among the string, and peppermints, and buttons, and tops, and nibs, and chalk, and foreign postage-stamps in his knickerbocker pockets.

"One could but try," the sportsman replied, and he held out his hand

But Jane pulled at her brother's jacket-tail, and whispered, "Ask him what he wants it for."

So then the sportsman had to confess that he wanted the firework to kill the white grouse with; and, when they came to look, there was the white grouse himself, sitting in the snow, looking quite pale and care-worn, and waiting anxiously for the matter to be decided one way or the other

George put all the things back in his pockets, and said, "No, I sha'n't. The season for shooting him stopped yesterday—I heard father say so—so it wouldn't be fair, anyhow. I'm very sorry; but I can't—so there!"

The sportsman said nothing, only he shook his fist at Jane, and then he got on the slide and tried to go towards the Crystal Palace—which was not easy, because that way is up-hill. So they left him trying, and went on

Before they started the white grouse thanked them in a few pleasant, well-chosen words, and then they took a sideways slanting run, and started off again on the great slide.

"THEY STARTED OFF AGAIN ON THE GREAT SLIDE."

and so away towards the North Pole and the twinkling, beautiful lights.

The great slide went on and on, and the lights did not seem to come much nearer, and the white silence wrapped them round as they slid along the wide, icy path. Then once again the silence was broken to bits by someone calling:—

"Hi! You there! Stop!"

"Tumble for your life!" cried George, and

tumbled as before, stopping in the only possible way, and Jane stopped on top of him, and they crawled to the edge, and came suddenly on the butterfly collector who was looking for specimens with a pair of blue glasses, and a blue net, and a blue book with coloured plates.

"Excuse me," said the collector, "but have you such a thing as a needle about you—a very long needle?"

"I have a needle *book*," replied Jane, politely, "but there aren't any needles in it now. George took them all to do the things with pieces of cork in the 'Boy's Own Scientific Experimenter' and 'The Young Mechanic.' He did not do the things, but he did for the needles."

"HAVE YOU SUCH A THING AS A NEEDLE ABOUT YOU?"

"Curiously enough," said the collector, "I, too, wished to use the needle in connection with cork."

"I have a hat pin in my hood," said Jane. "I fastened the fur with it when it caught in the nail on the greenhouse door. It is very long and sharp—would that do?"

"One could but try," said the collector, and Jane began to feel for the pin. But George pinched her arm and whispered, "Ask what he wants it for." Then the collector had to own that he wanted the pin to stick through the great Arctic moth, "a magnificent specimen," he added, "which I am most anxious to preserve."

And there, sure enough, in the collector's butterfly-net sat the great Arctic moth listening attentively to the conversation.

"Oh, I couldn't!" cried Jane. And while George was explaining to the collector that they would really rather not, Jane opened the blue folds of the butterfly-net, and asked the moth, quietly, if it would please step outside for a moment. And it did.

When the collector saw that the moth was free, he seemed less angry than grieved.

"Well, well," said he, "here's a whole Arctic expedition thrown away! I shall have to go home and fit out another. And that means a lot of writing to the papers and things. You seem to be a singularly thoughtless little girl."

So they went on, leaving him, too, trying to go up-hill towards the Crystal Palace.

When the great white Arctic moth had returned thanks in a suitable speech, George and Jane took a sideways slanting run and started sliding again, between the star-lamps along the great slide, towards the North Pole. They went faster and faster, and the lights ahead grew brighter and brighter—so that they could not keep their eyes open, but had to blink and wink as they went—and then suddenly the great slide ended in an immense heap of snow, and George and Jane shot right into it because they could not stop themselves, and the snow was soft so that they went in up to their very ears.

When they had picked themselves out, and thumped each other on the back to get rid of the snow, they shaded their eyes and looked, and there, right in front of them, was the wonder of wonders—the North Pole towering high and white and glistening, like an ice-lighthouse, and it was quite, quite

close, so that you had to put your head as far back as it would go, and farther, before you could see the high top of it. It was made entirely of ice. You will hear grown up people talk a great deal of nonsense about the North Pole, and when you are grown-up, it is even possible that you may talk nonsense about it yourself (the most unlikely things do happen), but deep down in your heart you must always remember that the North Pole is made of clear ice, and could not possibly, if you come to think of it, be made of anything else.

All round the Pole, making a bright ring about it, were hundreds of little fires, and the flames of them did not flicker and twist, but went up blue and green and rosy and straight like the stalks of dream lilies.

Jane said so, but George said they were as straight as ramrods.

And these flames were the Aurora Borealis—which the children had seen as far away as Forest Hill.

The ground was quite flat, and covered with smooth, hard snow, which shone and sparkled like the top of a birthday cake which has been iced at home. The ones done at the shops do not shine and sparkle, because they mix flour with the icing-sugar.

"It is like a dream," said Jane.

And George said, "It *is* the North Pole. Just think of the fuss people always make about getting here—and it was no trouble at all, really."

"I daresay lots of people have *got* here," said Jane, dismally; "it's not the getting *here*—I see that—it's the getting back again. Perhaps no one will ever know that *we* have been here, and the robins will cover us with leaves and——"

"Nonsense," said George, "there aren't any robins, and there aren't any leaves. It's just the North Pole, that's all, and I've found it; and now I shall try to climb up and plant the British flag on the top—my handkerchief will do; and if it really *is* the North Pole, my pocket compass Uncle James gave me will spin round and round, and then I shall know. Come on."

So Jane came on; and when they got close to the clear, tall, beautiful flames they saw that there was a great, queer-shaped lump of ice all round the bottom of the Pole—clear, smooth, shining ice, that was deep, beautiful Prussian blue, like icebergs, in the thick parts, and all sorts of wonderful, glimmery, shimmery, changing colours in the thin parts, like the cut-glass chandelier in grandmamma's house in London.

"It is a very curious shape," said Jane; "it's almost like"—she drew back a step to get a better view of it—"it's almost like a *dragon*."

"It's much more like the lamp-posts on the Thames Embankment," said George, who had noticed a curly thing like a tail that went twisting up the North Pole.

"Oh, George," cried Jane, "it *is* a dragon; I can see its wings. Whatever shall we do?"

And, sure enough, it *was* a dragon—a great, shining, winged, scaly, clawy, big-mouthed dragon—made of pure ice. It

"SURE ENOUGH, IT WAS A DRAGON."

must have gone to sleep curled round the hole where the warm steam used to come up from the middle of the earth, and then when the earth got colder, and the column of steam froze and was turned into the North Pole, the dragon must have got frozen in his sleep—frozen too hard to move—and there he stayed. And though he was very terrible he was very beautiful, too.

Jane said so, but George said, "Oh, don't bother; I'm thinking how to get on to the Pole and try the compass without waking the brute."

The dragon certainly was beautiful, with his deep, clear Prussian-blueness, and his rainbow-coloured glitter. And rising from within the cold coil of the frozen dragon the North Pole shot up like a pillar made of one great diamond, and every now and then it cracked a little, from sheer coldness. The sound of the cracking was the only thing that broke the great white silence in the midst of which the dragon lay like an enormous jewel, and the straight flames went up all round him like the stalks of tall lilies.

And as the children stood there looking at the most wonderful sight their eyes had ever seen, there was a soft padding of feet and a hurry-scurry behind them, and from the outside darkness beyond the flame-stalks came a crowd of little brown creatures running, jumping, scrambling, tumbling head over heels, and on all fours, and some even walking on their heads. They caught hands as they came near the fires, and danced round in a ring.

"It's bears," said Jane; "I know it is. Oh, how I wish we hadn't come, and my boots are so wet."

The dancing ring broke up suddenly, and the next moment hundreds of furry arms clutched at George and Jane, and they found themselves in the middle of a great, soft, heaving crowd of little fat people in brown fur dresses, and the white silence was quite gone.

"Bears, indeed," cried a shrill voice; "you'll wish we *were* bears before you've done with us!"

This sounded so dreadful, that Jane began to cry. Up to now the children had only seen the most beautiful and wondrous things, but now they began to be sorry they had done what they were told not to, and the difference between "lawn" and "grass" did not seem so great as it had done at Forest Hill.

Directly Jane began to cry, all the brown people started back. No one cries in the Arctic regions for fear of being struck so by the frost. So that these people had never seen anyone cry before.

"Don't cry *really*," whispered George, "or you'll get chilblains in your eyes. But *pretend* to howl—it frightens them."

So Jane went on pretending to howl, and the real crying stopped; it always does when you begin to pretend. You try it.

Then, speaking very loud so as to be heard over the howls of Jane, George said, "Yah—who's afraid? We are George and Jane—who are you?"

"We are the sealskin dwarfs," said the brown people, twisting their furry bodies in and out of the crowd like the changing glass in kaleidoscopes; "we are very precious and expensive, for we are made, throughout, of the very best sealskin."

"And what are those fires for?" bellowed George—for Jane was crying louder and louder.

"Those," shouted the dwarfs, coming a step nearer, "are the fires we make to thaw the dragon. He is frozen now—so he sleeps curled up round the Pole—but when we have thawed him with our fires he will wake up and go and eat everybody in the world except us."

"Whatever—do—you—want—him—to—do—that—for?" yelled George.

"Oh—just for spite," bawled the dwarfs, carelessly—as if they were saying "Just for fun."

Jane left off crying to say, "You *are* heartless."

"No, we aren't," they said; "our hearts are made of the finest sealskin, just like little fat sealskin purses——"

And they all came a step nearer. They were very fat and round. Their bodies were like sealskin jackets on a very stout person, their heads were like sealskin muffs, their legs were like sealskin boas, and their hands and feet were like sealskin tobacco-pouches. And their faces were like seals' faces, inasmuch as they, too, were covered with sealskin.

"Thank you so much for telling us," said George. "Good evening. (Keep on howling, Jane.)"

But the dwarfs came a step nearer, muttering and whispering. Then the muttering stopped—and there was a silence so deep that Jane was afraid to howl in it. But it was a brown silence, and she had liked the white silence better.

Then the chief dwarf came quite close and said: "What's that on your head?"

And George felt it was all up—for he knew it was his father's sealskin cap.

The dwarf did not wait for an answer. "It's made of one of *us*," he screamed, "or else one of the seals; our poor relations. Boy, now your fate is sealed!"

And looking at the wicked seal-faces all around them George and Jane felt that their fate was sealed indeed.

The dwarfs seized the children in their furry arms. George kicked, but it is no use

"THE DWARFS SEIZED THE CHILDREN."

kicking sealskin, and Jane howled, but the dwarfs were getting used to that. They climbed up the dragon's side and dumped the children down on his icy spine, with their backs against the North Pole. You have no idea how cold it was—the kind of cold that makes you feel small and prickly inside your clothes, and makes you wish you had twenty times as many clothes to feel small and prickly inside of.

The sealskin dwarfs tied George and Jane to the North Pole, and, as they had no ropes, they bound them with snow-wreaths, which are very strong when they are made in the proper way, and they heaped up the fires very close and said —

"Now the dragon will get warm, and when he gets warm he will wake, and when he wakes he will be hungry, and when he is hungry he will begin to eat, and the first thing he will eat will be *you*."

The little, sharp, many-coloured flames sprang up like the stalks of dream lilies, but no heat came to the children, and they grew colder and colder.

"We sha'n't be very nice when the dragon does eat us, that's one comfort," said George, "we shall be turned into ice long before that."

Suddenly there was a flapping of wings, and the white grouse perched on the dragon's head and said:

"Can I be of any assistance?"

Now by this time the children were so cold, so cold, so very, very cold, that they had forgotten everything but that, and they could say nothing else. So the white grouse said —

"One moment. I am only too grateful for this opportunity of showing my sense of your manly conduct about the firework!"

And the next moment there was a soft whispering rustle of wings overhead, and then, fluttering slowly, softly down, came hundreds and thousands of little white fluffy feathers. They fell on George and Jane like snowflakes, and, like flakes of fallen snow lying one above another, they grew into a thicker and thicker covering, so that presently the children were buried under a heap of white feathers, and only their faces peeped out.

"Oh, you dear, good, kind white grouse," said Jane; "but you'll be cold yourself, won't you, now you have given us all your pretty dear feathers?"

The white grouse laughed, and his laugh was echoed by thousands of kind, soft bird-voices.

"Did you think all those feathers came out of one breast? There are hundreds and hundreds of us here, and every one of us can

spare a little tuft of soft breast feathers to help to keep two kind little hearts warm!"

Thus spoke the grouse, who certainly had very pretty manners

So now the children snuggled under the feathers and were warm, and when the sealskin dwarfs tried to take the feathers away, the grouse and his friends flew in their faces with flappings and screams, and drove the dwarfs back. They are a cowardly folk.

The dragon had not moved yet—but then he might at any moment get warm enough to move, and though George and Jane were now warm they were not comfortable, nor easy in their minds. They tried to explain to the grouse; but though he is polite, he is not clever, and he only said:—

"You've got a warm nest, and we'll see that no one takes it from you. What more can you possibly want?"

Just then came a new, strange, jerky fluttering, of wings far softer than the grouse's, and George and Jane cried out together:—

"Oh, *do* mind your wings in the fires!"

For they saw at once that it was the great white Arctic moth.

"What's the matter?" he asked, settling on the dragon's tail.

So they told him.

"Sealskin, are they?" said the moth; "just you wait a minute!"

He flew off very crookedly, dodging the flames, and presently he came back, and there were so many moths with him that it was as if a live sheet of white wingedness were suddenly drawn between the children and the stars.

And then the doom of the bad sealskin dwarfs fell suddenly on them.

For the great sheet of winged whiteness broke up and fell, as snow falls, and it fell upon the sealskin dwarfs, and every snowflake of it was a live, fluttering, hungry moth, that buried its greedy nose deep in the sealskin fur.

Grown up people will tell you that it is not moths but moths' children who eat fur—but this is only when they are trying to deceive you. When they are not thinking about you they say, "I fear the moths have got at my ermine tippet," or, "Your poor Aunt Emma had a lovely sable cloak, but it was eaten by moths." And now there were more moths than have ever been together in this world before, all settling on the sealskin dwarfs.

The dwarfs did not see their danger till it was too late. Then they called for camphor and bitter apple, and oil of lavender, and yellow soap and borax; and some of the dwarfs even started to get these things, but long before any of them could get to the chemist's, all was over. The moths ate, and ate, and ate, till the sealskin dwarfs, being sealskin throughout, even to the empty hearts of them, were eaten down to the very life—and they fell one by one on the snow and so came to their end. And all round the North Pole the snow was brown with their flat bare pelts.

"Oh, thank you—thank you, darling Arctic moth," cried Jane. "You *are* good—I do hope you haven't eaten enough to disagree with you afterwards!"

Millions of moth-voices answered, with laughter as soft as moth-wings, "We should be a poor set of fellows if we couldn't overeat ourselves for once in a way—to oblige a friend."

And off they all fluttered, and the white grouse flew off, and the sealskin dwarfs were all dead, and the fires went out, and George and Jane were left alone in the dark with the dragon!

"Oh, dear," said Jane, "this is the worst of all!"

"We've no friends left to help us," said George. He never thought that the dragon himself might help them—but then that was an idea that would never have occurred to any boy.

It grew colder and colder and colder, and even under the grouse feathers the children shivered.

Then, when it was so cold that it could not manage to be any colder without breaking the thermometer, it stopped. And then the dragon uncurled himself from round the North Pole, and stretched his long, icy length over the snow, and said:—

"This is something like! How faint those fires did make me feel!"

The fact was, the sealskin dwarfs had gone the wrong way to work: the dragon had been frozen so long that now he was nothing but solid ice all through, and the fires only made him feel as if he were going to die.

But when the fires were out he felt quite well, and very hungry. He looked round for something to eat. But he never noticed George and Jane, because they were frozen to his back.

He moved slowly off, and the snow-wreaths that bound the children to the Pole gave way with a snap, and there was the dragon, crawling south—with Jane and George on his great, scaly, icy shining back. Of course the dragon had to go south if he went anywhere, because when you get to the North

Pole there is no other way to go. The dragon rattled and tinkled as he went, exactly like the cut glass chandelier when you touch it, as you are strictly forbidden to do. Of course there are a million ways of going south from the North Pole—so you will own that it was lucky for George and Jane when the dragon took the right way and suddenly got his heavy feet on the great slide. Off he went, full speed, between the starry lamps, towards Forest Hill and the Crystal Palace.

"He's going to take us home," said Jane. "Oh, he is a good dragon. I *am* glad!"

"OFF HE WENT, FULL SPEED."

And George was rather glad too, though neither of the children felt at all sure of their welcome, especially as their feet were wet, and they were bringing a strange dragon home with them.

They went very fast, because dragons can go up hill as easily as down. You would not understand why if I told you—because you are only in long division at present; yet if you want me to tell you, so that you can show off to other boys, I will. It is because dragons can get their tails into the fourth dimension and hold on there, and when you can do that everything else is easy.

The dragon went very fast, only stopping to eat the collector and the sportsman, who were still struggling to go up the slide—vainly, because they had no tails, and had never even heard of the fourth dimension.

And when the dragon got to the end of the slide he crawled very slowly across the dark field beyond the field where there was a bonfire, next to the next-door garden at Forest Hill. He went slower and slower, and in the bonfire field he stopped altogether, and, because the Arctic regions had not got down so far as that, and because the bonfire was very hot, the dragon began to melt, and melt, and melt—and before the children knew what he was doing they found themselves sitting in a large pool of water, and their boots were as wet as wet, and there was not a bit of dragon left!

So they went indoors.

Of course some grown up or other noticed at once that the boots of George and of Jane were wet and muddy, and that they had both been sitting down in a very damp place, so they were sent to bed immediately.

It was long past their time, anyhow.

Now, if you are of an inquiring mind—not at all a nice thing in a little boy who reads fairy tales—you will want to know how it is that since the sealskin dwarfs have all been killed, and the fires all been let out, the Aurora Borealis shines, on cold nights, as brightly as ever.

My dear, I do not know! I am not too proud to own that there are some things I know nothing about—and this is one of them. But I do know that whoever has lighted those fires again, it is certainly not the sealskin dwarfs. They were all eaten by moths—and moth-eaten things are of no use, even to light fires!